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25 CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

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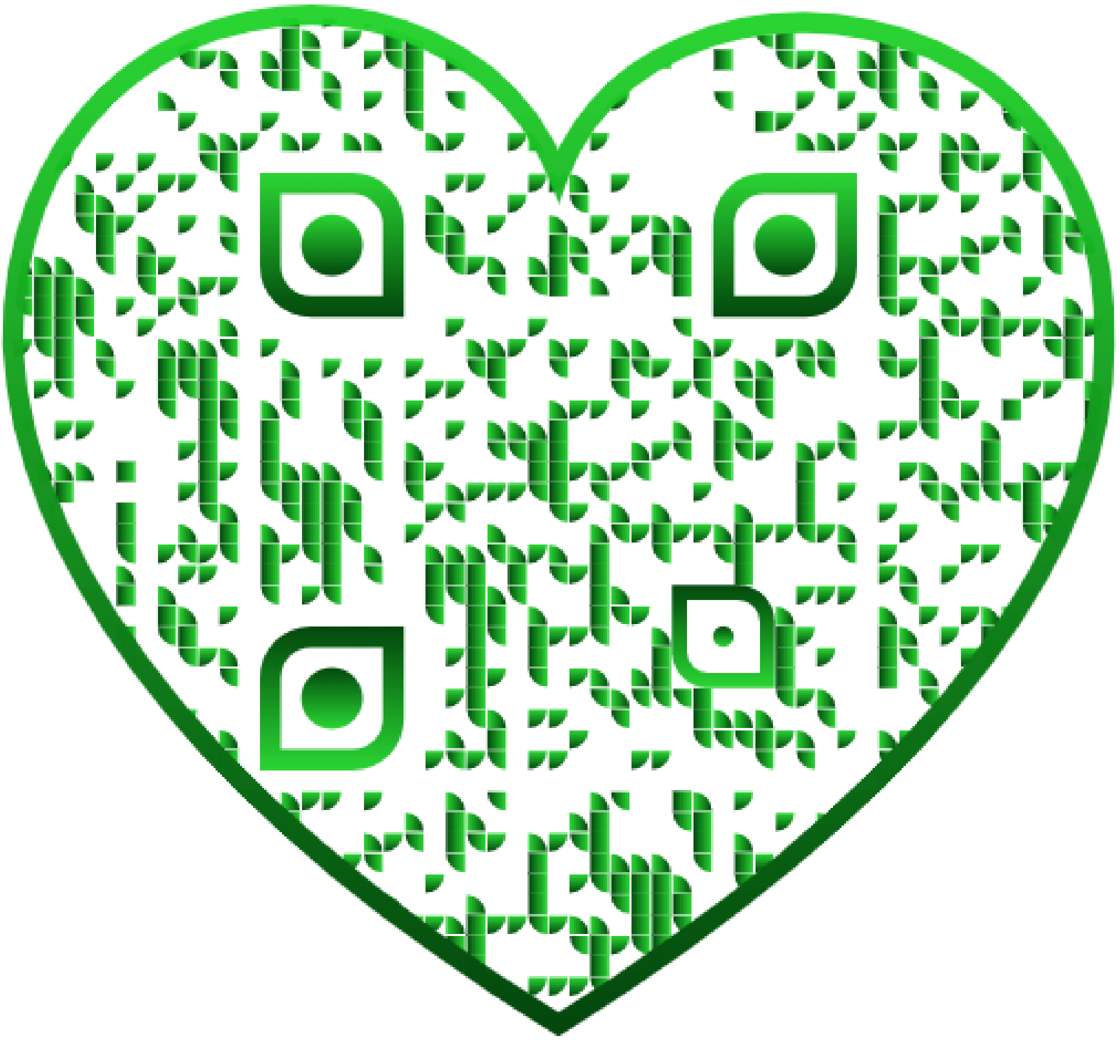

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***Acoustic* magazine is proud to support the Music Industries Association.**

A LITTLE WORD

I always look forward to putting together the festive edition of *Acoustic* magazine – it means it's time to compile a round up of the year's greatest guitars and it always brings about the "perfect" debate. What is it that makes a guitar perfect? Ask ten different players this question and, naturally, you'll get ten different answers. Perfection should be something to strive for – not a title given because of the brand adorning the headstock or the fact that the spruce used for its soundboard was "moon harvested". Can humans create something perfect, something flawless for its intended purpose and unable to fail? Or is it just a question to make us ponder and debate? Of course, we can't answer that, but what we'll do is this: present you with every guitar that we've reviewed during 2014 that we think truly deserves your attention; ones that you can buy in confidence knowing that they're the best guitars available today. We rate all of the gear in each issue on its sounds and playability, build quality, and value for money – and this is the criteria by which the guitars are judged for this 2014 round up.

Something we've seen more of in 2014 are major manufacturers coming a long way in competing with bespoke luthiery – and in some cases working closely with artists and luthiers to gain a more boutique feel. 2014 also saw a plethora of amazing parlour and small-bodied guitars – this leads me on to this month's cover star: the Wee Lowden. Having been unveiled at the 2014 January NAMM show – and to coincide with George Lowden's 40th year in business – the Wee Lowden is finally making its way to dealers around the world, and into the hands of some notable players, too. How about Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody, and globe trotting troubadour Ed Sheeran for size? To celebrate both the Wee Lowden and George's 40th anniversary, we're looking at two different Wee Lowdens in this issue: the special edition 40th Anniversary upgrade (which will set you back £4,550) and the standard WL-25 (yours for £2,775). George tells us about Lowden's latest additions in his interview on page 66. The kind folks at Lowden have also donated a standard edition Wee Lowden to give away to *Acoustic* readers – check out how it could be yours over on page 10.

As the year draws to an end, it's out with the old and in with the new, right? Check out Hudson Taylor and get ready to update your iTunes with their debut album *Singing For Strangers* in February 2015. The Irish brothers are fine songwriters and guitar players, but with harmonies you'd only expect coming from folks with Simon and Garfunkel for surnames.

Enjoy the issue – the next time we meet will be for *Acoustic's* 100th issue and what a treat we've got in store for you. See you then for champagne and a certain Australian...

Guy Little
Editor

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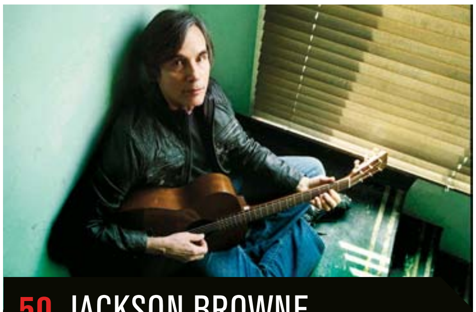
36 HUDSON TAYLOR

Set to release their hotly anticipated debut album *Singing For Strangers* in February 2015, Irish sibling duo Hudson Taylor has spent the last five years honing their infectious brand of music – and in doing so, going from busking the streets of their native Dublin to playing huge festivals across the UK and abroad, and signing with a major label.

RETUNE YOUR EARS

14 Listen to something new, with Paul Strange

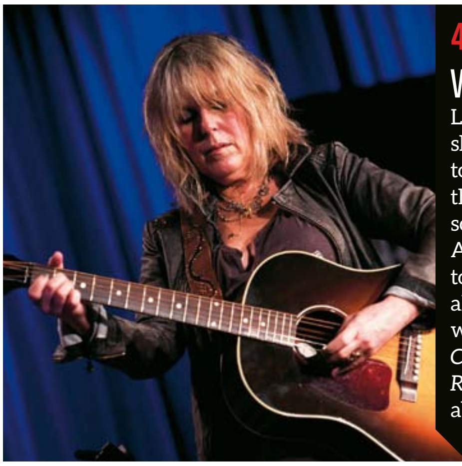


50 JACKSON BROWNE

Jackson Browne talks to *Acoustic* about his "instant classic" 14th album *Standing In The Breach*, vintage Martin guitars, and the pressure to keep recording music that is still in touch with what matters.

40 TONY MCMANUS

No boundaries: Tony McManus held crowds rapt at this year's London Acoustic Guitar Show with his miraculous playing and atmospheric music. Joel McIver meets the maestro



44 LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Lucinda Williams' story should give inspiration to singer-songwriters throughout the land. After scuffling in New Orleans, Austin, and Houston, it took 25 years and four albums to find acclaim with her Americana classic *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road*. She talks to *Acoustic* about her hard road to success and new album.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES

Improve your playing with our techniques section...

With 12 pages of different level-specific techniques, whether you're a novice or an expert our columns have something for everyone.

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Play like Ben Howard and John Martyn with this picking hand technique

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18 GEAR OF THE YEAR
Acoustic takes a look back over the year and picks the 20 best acoustic guitars you can buy for under £1,000 and the 20 best acoustic guitars you can buy for over £1,000. We've also thrown in some of our other favourite bits of gear, too.

94 CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE
As it's time for the holidays, we've put together an extensive Christmas gift guide for all you instrument aficionados. We've got everything from mini amps to travel guitars, all for your seasonal perusal.

102 IN THE LOOP
How do we define success as a musician? For some people it's selling thousands of albums, for others selling out Wembley stadium – or even the local pub. For me, it's all about coming up with interesting chord sequences and guitar parts. In this month's column we'll be looking at getting the most from a fairly basic chord progression – but live looping offers virtually infinite opportunities to create interesting musical ideas.

92 THE NEXT BIG THING
Millers Daughter could just be the next radio sensation; these twin sisters from Wiltshire, with their crystalline harmonies, intricate guitar style and glossy production have all the ingredients to set Radio 2 on fire. Christie and Louise are real, talented, and on the rise, and *Acoustic* took the opportunity to discuss their album *So Hollywood*.

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Acoustic keeps you up to date with what's hot and what's not in our gear reviews section.

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David Mead takes a look at an exciting addition to the formidable Lowden acoustic guitar range...

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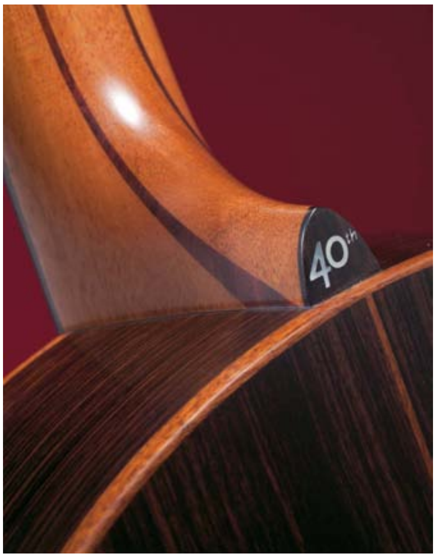
An Angel from the Antipodes descends upon unsuspecting reviewer David Mead

76 SANTA CRUZ OM CUSTOM SHOP
Take Santa Cruz's reputation for excellence and add a degree of custom shop variability – David Mead is like a kid in a sweetshop!

82 TANGLEWOOD TW28 EVOLUTION SERIES
With smart design and even smarter pricing, Tanglewood is out to prove that anyone can afford a dash of luthier-built class. Alun Lower finds out more...

86 AUDEN CHESTER CEDAR
There's a new kid on the block, but will it stand up to the big kids or get kicked out of the school yard? Alun Lower investigates...



NEWS DESK

ACOUSTIC BRINGS YOU ALL OF THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF ACOUSTIC MUSIC.

GREAT BRITISH BANJO COMPANY LAUNCH FIVE NEW MODELS

New additions to the Shackleton range for 2015 from the UK's only banjo factory

The UK's only production banjo firm, the Great British Banjo Company, launched with a Kickstarter campaign just over 12 months ago and has now built up a solid reputation for making high quality banjos from its Norwich factory.

Its first instrument – an openback banjo named the Shackleton after the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton that retails for £595 – has sold more than 200 units, including exports to the USA. Custom paint and lacquer versions of the Shackleton are also available, which the company says it can produce in any colour, priced from £795.

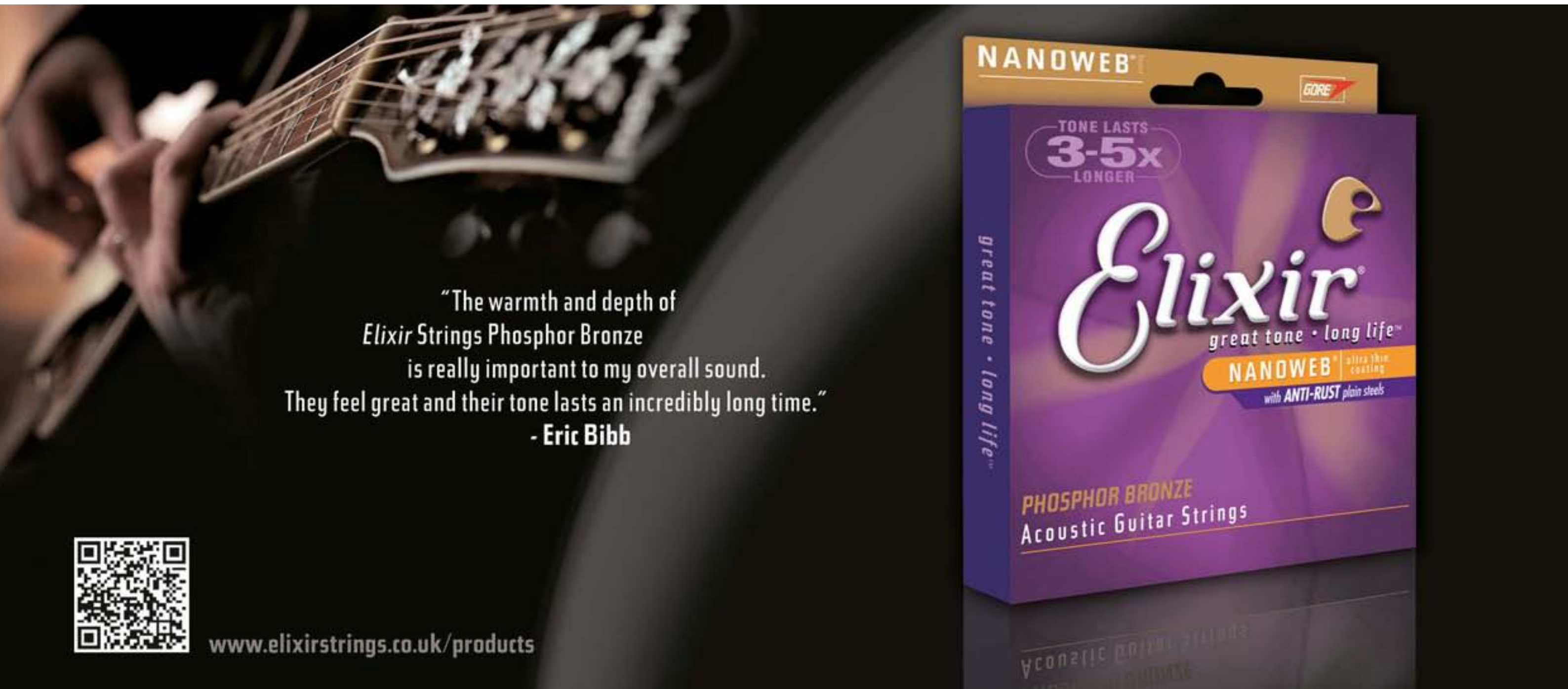
The new additions to the Shackleton range for 2015 are: an enhanced version of the Shackleton openback, called the Shackleton Two at £895; a resonator back version called the Shackleton Bluegrass at £895; a six-string "banjitar" version called the Shackleton Sixer at £995; a new high-end block rim model called the Shackleton Islander at £2,245; and a wooden soundboard electric banjo named the Shackleton Endurance at £1,245.

Founder and managing director of the company Simon Middleton says: 'We've been able to expand the range so quickly because everything is designed, prototyped and manufactured entirely in-house in our Norfolk factory. This approach allows us to innovate very quickly and gives us complete control of the quality of our output. The new instruments are all superb quality in sound, feel and aesthetic appeal. They're more expensive than Chinese imports, but actually they're not that much more expensive when you consider the desirability of handmade British products.'

All of the company's instruments are handmade in its Norwich factory and come with a six-year transferable warranty. The company's instruments are currently exclusively available from their Norwich factory shop.

'It's a superb range of British hand-crafted instruments, and we've achieved it in just over a year, thanks to fantastic customer support and our passing for making great quality products at attainable prices,' says Simon Middleton.

For more information, visit the website: ***www.thegreatbritishbanjocompany.com***



JON GOMM DEBUTS NEW SINGLE 'DANCE OF THE LAST RHINO'

Ten per cent of all sale proceeds from the single and its sheet music will be donated to Save The Rhino

Percussive maestro Jon Gomm has unveiled his new track 'Dance Of The Last Rhino' in support of Save The Rhino. Both the song and the sheet music for 'Dance Of The Last Rhino' are available for download from Jon's website and 10 per cent of all proceeds from the sales will go to the Save The Rhino foundation.

'I originally wrote this tune specially for playing in South Africa,' Jon says. 'South Africans are the human race's custodians of some of the most magnificent, yet vulnerable treasures of the natural world. It's almost unbelievable that in 2014 the rhino is in danger of being hunted to extinction. 'Dance of the Last Rhino' isn't a sad piece, though – it's a war dance. The rhino is a noble, warrior-like animal, and they won't go out without a fight.'

Jon plays his Lowden O12c guitar – also known as "Wilma". You can see the video for 'Dance Of The Last Rhino' in the digital edition, and via Jon's website where you can also buy the track and get the sheet music.

For more information, visit: ***www.jongomm.com***

KORG APPOINTED NEW DISTRIBUTOR OF TAKAMINE GUITARS

Follows Fender's announcement to part ways with the Japanese brand

Following on from Hamer, Tacoma and Guild, Japanese guitar manufacturer Takamine is the latest brand to be shed by Fender, effective December 31, 2014. Korg UK will become the exclusive distributor for Takamine Guitars in the UK and Ireland, effective from January 2015.

'We are very pleased to have the brand re-join our company,' says Korg UK managing director Rob Castle. 'Takamine are the pioneers of electro-acoustic guitars and they continue to pioneer – there is much new to talk about in 2015. The guitars continue to be played by legends such as Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi, the Eagles and Biffy Clyro and support the success of many others.'

For more information, visit the Korg website: ***www.korg.com/uk***

GRETSCH RELEASE LIMITED EDITION JIM DANDY FLAT TOP ACOUSTIC IN BRONZE BURST

Another guitar to join its famed Roots Collection of folk instruments

Gretsch has released the latest addition to its popular Roots Collection: the Gretsch G9520-BRB Jim Dandy flat top acoustic guitar. Bang-on quality and dapper good looks make this second-edition limited release instrument a must-have for your collection. Faithfull to the Gretsch "Rex" parlor guitars of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the limited-release bronze burst Jim Dandy flat top embodies everything that was great about everyone's first guitar.

For more information and up-to-date pricing, visit the Gretsch website: ***www.gretschguitars.com***

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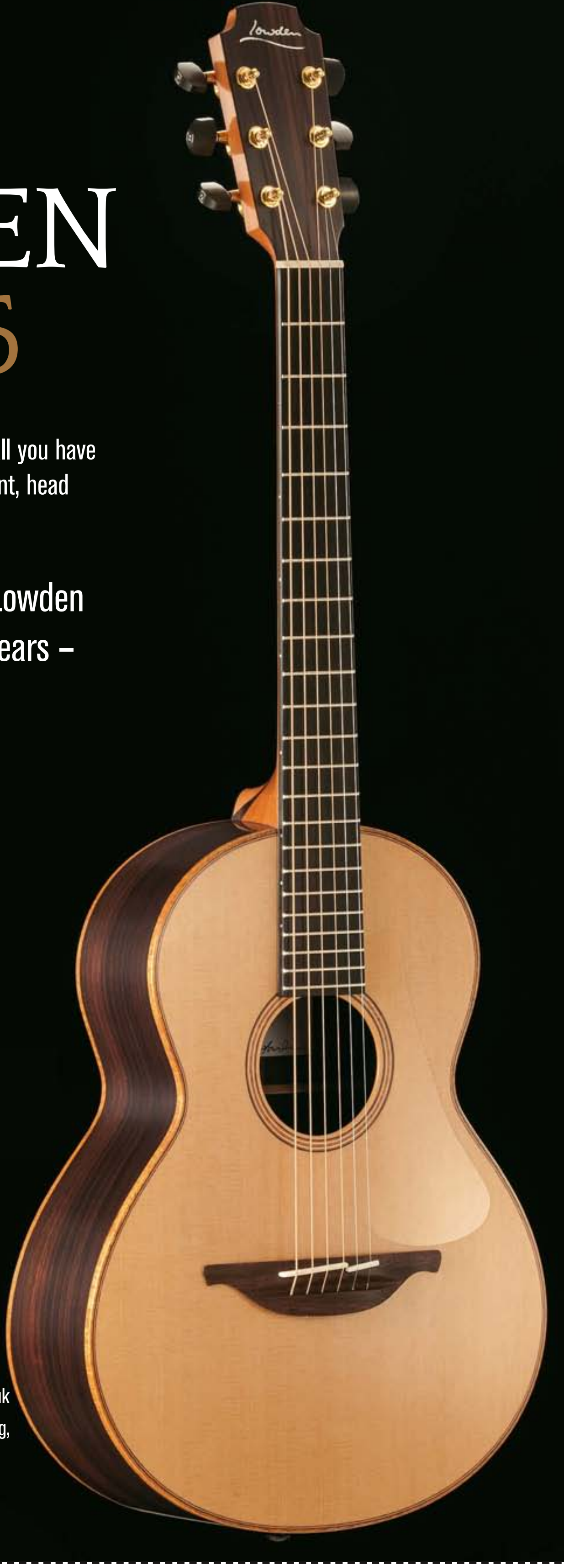

If you want to win an incredible Wee Lowden, courtesy of George Lowden Guitars, all you have to do is answer the following question correctly! Couldn't be easier. If you need a hint, head over to **www.lowdenguitars.com**

As one of the world's most notable guitar makers, George Lowden has been building guitars from Northern Ireland for many years – but which anniversary did 2014 bring for the brand?

A) 30 YEARS

B) 40 YEARS

C) 50 YEARS

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www.lowdenguitars.com www.facebook.com/lowdenguitars

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Closing date for the Wee Lowden competition is 12 March 2015. The winner will be announced 23 March 2015.

*Required details to enter the competition

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*Competition entries must arrive no later than the closing date specified. The winner will be announced on 23 March 2015. Only the winner will be contacted. One entry per household. Image(s) of winner may be used for future editorial or advertising purposes. The winner will be selected at random from all the correct entries. No cash alternative is offered. Acoustic magazine reserves the right to substitute the prize for an alternative of equal or greater value. The competition guitar is a custom build acoustic and, as such, the time it takes to complete must be factored in. Upon entering the competition, you confirm that you understand the competition prize will not be ready for collection from Blaze Publishing Ltd. until April/May 2015.

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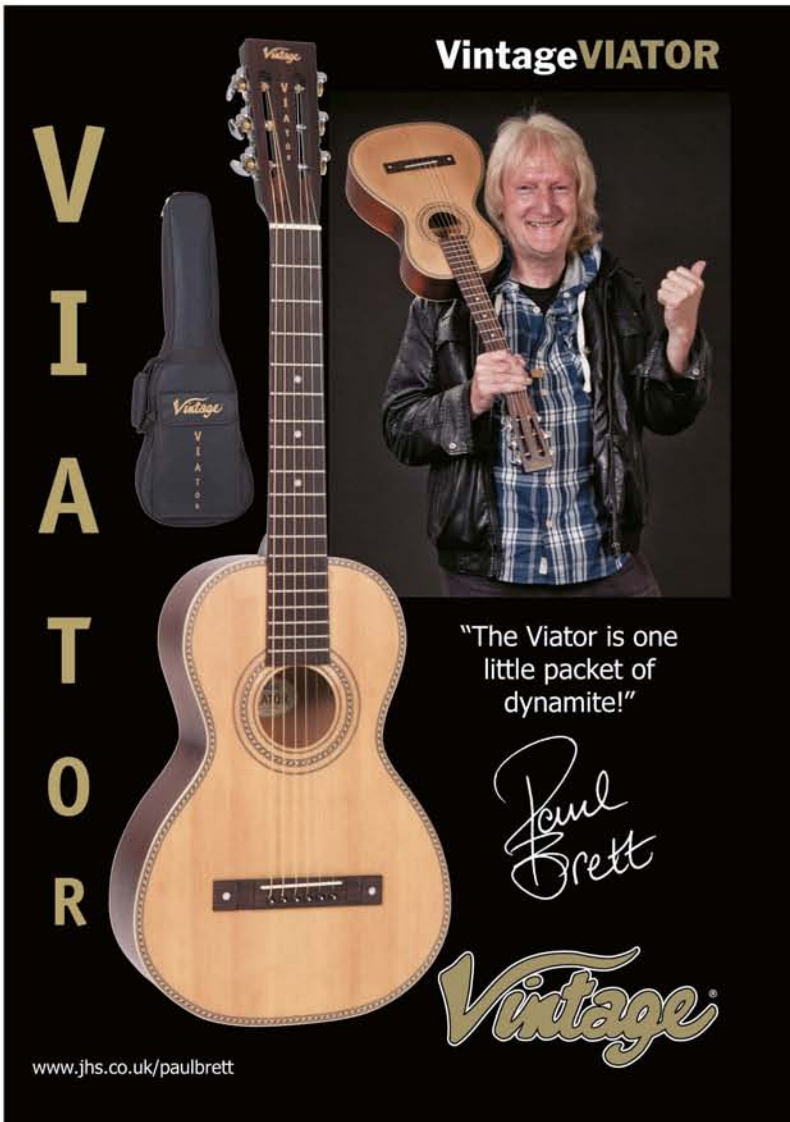
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ASK THE EXPERTS

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LIBRARY TRACKS

Library music may not be the most glamorous, but for a composer or writer, it's another way to top up your income.

Library music is the incidental music that you hear on TV and radio. It rose to prominence during the 60s and 70s, in the "golden age" of British TV. Ever heard of 'Approaching Menace' by Neil Richardson or Alan Hawkshaw's 'Chicken Man'? The theme tunes to *Mastermind* and *Grange Hill* both started life as library tracks.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LIBRARY TRACK?

Library tracks exist to provide underscore, a musical bed upon which images and dialogue can be laid. Background music may be a term of abuse in the world of commercial music, but there couldn't be a higher compliment when it comes to library. Of course, trends come and go – in the 60s and 70s library music was synonymous with easy listening mood music. In the 90s it was difficult to switch on your TV without hearing library trip-hop. These days, though, it's worth thinking outside the box.

HOW DO I START?

Do your research. Have a look around at what the libraries are releasing. Think about the sort of music they need, and any gaps they might have in their catalogue. Think about how to make your music appeal to libraries through words. Give your tracks titles that instantly conjure up memorable images. Have a concept. Use the opportunity to explain what the music is like. Try to make your music timeless. Think long-term. A track that sounds bang up to date in 2014 might not be used in five years' time, let alone 20.

Get your contract checked. Most libraries hold the copyright of a track for perpetuity and split royalties 50/50 with the composer. So-called royalty-free or copyright-free library music, where the library pays a flat fee up front to the writer, has grown in popularity. But many in the industry feel that this represents a bad deal for all concerned. Get in touch for advice on what constitutes a fair deal. Then, when your track has been accepted, the best thing you can do is sit back and forget about it.

That's the thing about library – it's very much a long-term investment. You're unlikely to become rich overnight from this kind of work. But, if you're patient and prolific enough to build up a substantial back catalogue of tracks it can become a nice little earner.

IT'S GETTING RECOGNITION

October 2014 saw the inaugural Library Music Awards, celebrating library music and the composers and companies involved. 'It illustrated the importance and value of library music to the music industry. It's great that musicians are getting the recognition they deserve,' says Ben Jones, national organiser for recording and broadcasting at the MU.

A companion day of seminars also took place at BAFTA under the title Tune Up. 'It was a really interesting day of talks for composers, including an MU masterclass from Adam Goldsmith giving an insight into his experience of writing and performing library music, and how he undertakes remote recording sessions,' Ben says.

If you're an MU member and interested in library music, or have questions on any other aspect of your career, get in touch via theMU.org

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With Paul Strange

CARL EATON
STYLE… (BLUES)

I perform with my Exeter-based band Dumber Than The Average Bear. It's mostly blues-rock, but there are elements of roots, folk, reggae and funk. Our latest album – *Long Road To Mexico* – has just come out. I play a light natural-wood Martin Custom X and a Guild F-130. But my favourite is a dark-wood Gretsch G9220 Bobtail resonator semi-acoustic which looks great, plays great and sounds fantastic. It has a Muddy Waters type sound to it. I DI into the PA, and that way there are fewer things that can go wrong. On stage I also play the djembe and for our finale I swap between acoustic guitar, djembe and a Tanglewood banjo. I always write with an acoustic. I come to the band with an idea: we jam it out and then expand from there. I'm a prolific songwriter and get withdrawal symptoms if I don't play guitar for a few days. I can switch off from everyday life and create my own fantasy world of songwriting where anything goes. I had guitar lessons for a year, but I'm mainly self-taught. I use a pick but fingerpick songs that need a softer touch. I use alternate tunings on my Gretsch, mostly for that deep blues sound. Open D tuning is my favourite and works well when playing slide guitar. John Butler is my modern-day guitar hero, and I'm also influenced by the people in my band who have different styles to feed from. Future plans? We're promoting our album in 2015 and hope to play a few festivals in the summer. You can also download any of our albums from iTunes, Amazon or just listen to us on Spotify.
www.woodengunrecords.com

MATT WOOSEY
STYLE… (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

My music is blues-rooted acoustic sojourns. I play around 200 shows a year – solo, as a duo and with a full band. I have seven albums out, the latest being *Wildest Dreams*. The production and the playing of the other musicians have brought the more mature and varied songwriting of the album to life. Having Hammond player Paul Quinn come in and put his parts over what we'd already done was an exciting new dimension for me. My favourite track is 'I've Seen The Bottom'. Lyrically, it's a retrospective look at the darker parts of my earlier life and is reflected in the music. I've used a Taylor 210e dreadnought for the past nine years. I feel it shares my stories and all the ups and downs of life on the road. I use an LR Baggs M1 pickup and a LR Baggs DI box with a preamp EQ. Rory Gallagher, John Martyn and Bert Jansch are my acoustic guitar heroes. I always use an acoustic for songwriting. I start by messing around with a phrase and let the other parts unfold and include themselves naturally within the song. The melody comes next and inspires the lyrics. Other music, love and lack of love inspire me. I use many alternate tunings, especially open G and a variation of it where I tune the B string down to a G, meaning there are two Gs next to each other, giving a 12-string effect. Next year I have a live album coming out, plus several European tours, including Scandinavia. I'm also looking forward to a gig at the Blakeney Harbour Room in Norfolk in January and a return to London's 100 Club.
www.mattwoosey.co.uk

ANGE HARDY
STYLE… (FOLK)

Based in Somerset, I write songs in a traditional folk style, focusing on vocal harmony and storytelling. The stories on my recent album *The Lament Of The Black Sheep* have a common theme of heritage, motherhood and working the land. 'The Daring Lassie' – with James Findlay on guest vocals – is my current favourite. It's autobiographical, the song is a real journey and I could listen to James' voice all day long. I play a Martin 000-16GT acoustic guitar with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup. She sounds beautiful – great long sustain, particularly on the higher notes. I use a BSS AR-133 DI box into a Behringer X32 rack, which sits on stage with me for reverb, compression and EQ. The album features layered vocal harmonies. I use two DigiTech JamMan stereo loop pedals to achieve that effect live, with a Sennheiser E865 mic for vocals. I also use a Shure SM58 as a multi-purpose instrument mic, plus tambourine, bodhrán drum, shruti box, Chieftain low whistle and a 27-string Salvi harp. My life, the lives of others, and the music of those I admire – such as Kate Rusby, Tracy Chapman and Joan Baez – inspires me. I taught myself guitar while living homeless in Ireland at 14 having run away from a children's home in Somerset. I played different notes until they harmonised and discovered chords so that I could busk. I'm currently preparing a new album of original songs, inspired by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I'm up to York and Northumberland for a mini-tour in March, and a tour along the route of the Coleridge Way for the new album in October 2015.
www.angehardy.com

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JUNE SLUNG A GUITAR ACROSS HER BACK AND STEPPED INTO THE ROCK SCENE IN THE LATE '60S, FACING THE UNWRITTEN RULE: GUYS ROCK—GIRLS WATCH. SHE STOOD SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH MEN WHO WERE MORE RESPECTED. AND ROCKED. SHE OPENED FOR THE BIGGEST BANDS OF THE DECADE, STOOD UP FOR WHO SHE WAS AS A MUSICIAN, AND CHARTED A COURSE THAT OTHER WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY COULD FOLLOW. TODAY, SHE HELPS RUN A NON-PROFIT TO PREPARE WOMEN FOR THE SAME PRESSURES. THE PIONEER WITH NO ROLE MODEL IS NOW A ROLE MODEL HERSELF. THIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD NEEDS MORE TRAILBLAZERS LIKE JUNE. FOR MORE ON JUNE AND OTHER STORIES OF COURAGE THAT INSPIRE US, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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ACOUSTIC GEAR OF THE YEAR 2014

The past year has been nothing short of spectacular in terms of gear – we've reviewed custom acoustics from Patrick James Eggle, the brand new Wee Lowden from George and co. in Northern Ireland, relic'd dreadnoughts yearning for a bygone era from Alister Atkin, and just about everything else in between. Here are our highlights!

Over the last 12 months we have covered a huge range of products, encompassing many varieties of popular body shapes and sizes that we know and love, along with a few idiosyncratic interpretations on the classics. We've looked at six-string, 12-string, resonators, folk instruments, amps, pedals, pickups – you name it, and chances are, we've had a look at it. From price points anywhere between £100 and £25,000, and from the world's most respected brands to the most independent luthiers from around the globe. Investing in a guitar brand means you may well be thinking that consistency of build quality and, of course, playability, should be king.

Many of the guitars listed in our round-up make great headway towards fulfilling the great ideal characteristics that make them so unique in their individual categories.

Listed here are the best bits of gear we've reviewed in the year 2014. We have our top 20 acoustics (to include six- and 12-string models and resonators) and then a selection of highlights from the amps and electronics, and other stringed folk instruments. This round up is split into the guitars under a grand, and then the guitars that come in at over a grand. The highlights are the highest scoring that we've reviewed throughout 2014. The instruments were required to meet a minimum of average score of 4.5 points out of our 5 (or 86 per cent) based on our usual assessment of build quality, sound quality, and value for money. We added their total points and divided by three (our total number of assessment categories) and voila – there we have our independent scores, empowering you to make informed purchasing decisions. It must be said that having your guitar set-up to your personal requirements will yield optimal playing pleasure for you, whether that be fingerpicking, strumming, recording or slide, but these are the instruments that inspired us beyond belief.

TOP 20 GUITARS UNDER £1,000

FRESHMAN

SONGWRITER DCERW

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 92

{£599}

The DCERW displays a proud and timeless dreadnought tone, with a full and sonorous low end that begs for rhythm work and gives chords a full and distinctive voice. The choice of rosewood gives the guitar a crisp and glassy top. The AER electronics system proves its worth, translating the raw acoustic tone really quite well through an amplifier or in to a mixing desk. What really makes this Freshman standout is the solid construction, great presentations and competitive price. The search for your next guitar just got a lot harder.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought cutaway
Made In: China
Top: AA solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Solid rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: Freshman/AER t
Case: Hard case available

CONTACT DETAILS:

Freshman Guitars
www.freshmanguitars.net

SIMON AND PATRICK

SONGSMITH FOLK

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 92

{£399}

The Songsmith holds its own against the competition very well. Anyone searching for a good tone in the lower midrange acoustic guitar market would be well advised to check out the Songsmith as it has some serious virtues – and sings sweetly, too. We tried the Songsmith in a variety of different styles and it came up trumps every time. S&P will fit a B-Band A3T pickup as an optional extra, too, and we imagine this would transfer the guitar's charm amiably!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Folk
Made In: Canada
Top: Spruce
Back and Sides: Red wild cherry
Neck: Silver leaf maple
Fingerboard: Indian rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 631mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional B-Band A3T
Case: TRIC case

CONTACT DETAILS:

440 Distribution
www.440distribution.com

WASHBURN

LAKESIDE JUMBO

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 90

{£369}

The Lakeside Jumbo is a guitar with its roots well and truly embedded in history and which feels great to play and sounds wonderful – especially for this price. It really does make us think that, with the guitars coming from the Far East now, maybe it's time to readdress the age old question, "How much do I have to pay to get a good-sounding guitar?" because what we've seen and heard with this guitar is quite remarkable for £369, including a case.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: China
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Sound Technology
www.soundtech.co.uk

SEAGULL

S6 MAHOGANY DELUXE

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 90

{£525}

All-mahogany guitars demand a different set of criteria to that of the standard mahogany/cedar or rosewood/spruce – or variations thereon – options. To that end, they are not going to suit all players, but the Seagull is certainly a good example of the genre, despite not being solid mahogany throughout. It's been well designed and ably thought through and will doubtless impress its target audience of gigging musicians who want that distinctive all mahogany tone combined with an affordable price point.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: Canada
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Mahogany
Nut Width: 46mm
Scale Length: 647.5mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman Sonitone
Case: Gig bag (+£45)

CONTACT DETAILS:

440 Distribution
www.440distribution.com

TANGLEWOOD
SUNDANCE TW70EG

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 90

{£499}

The Sundance range from Tanglewood Guitars is an established part of the Tanglewood stable of acoustics, but this comes under the general heading "Elegance". The pure acoustic grand auditorium is a delight. You might expect the slight increase in body size and the lack of a cutaway to have a fairly dramatic impact on the TW70's sound but, in fact, it's far more subtle than that. This is a nicely made mid-price instrument with a great deal going for it.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Grand auditorium
Made In: China
Top: Spruce
Back and Sides: Nato
Neck: African mahogany
Fingerboard: Sonokeling
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

LEVINSON
LDC-25

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 88

{£954}

We have to remember which price zone we're in here. Just under £1k places the LDC at the very top of the mid price range but just below what you might want to call the lower top-end, in terms of factory built instruments. If you're looking for an electro dreadnought that doesn't break the £1000 barrier, then you would be wise to add this model to your shortlist as you're unlikely to find too many stage ready dreads sounding this good for the same money.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: Switzerland
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Sapele
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: East Indian rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman Presys +
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

Levinson Guitars
www.levinsonguitars.com

FAITH
NEPTUNE

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£799}

The all-mahogany Neptune from the Faith range really is an addictive instrument. Soulful, dynamic and punchy; this guitar just begs to be played and the baby jumbo format genuinely offers something that little bit different to the norm. This guitar has plenty to offer and will certainly surprise you – in a good way. Coupled with a dependable electronics package and a gorgeous hardcase, it's a great deal and you really ought to get out there and give one a try.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Solid mahogany
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Macassan figured ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Shadow Nanoflex II
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Barnes and Mullins
www.bandm.co.uk

LAG
T77PE PARLOUR

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 88

{£325}

We have been really impressed with the build quality and tonal capabilities of guitars coming out of China at present and this guitar sits up there with some of the best we've tried in recent months. With Michael Lag's flair for design added to the equation, I think that the T77 is a real winner on many counts. If you consider the build quality, tonal awareness and price point of instruments like this one, we might very soon have something of a mini revolution on our hands!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Parlour
Made In: China
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Piezeo NanoFlex
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

LAG Guitars UK
http://uk.lagguitars.com

ORTEGA
RCE158SN

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 89

{£466}

Ortega has clearly rethought the electro classical guitar and come up with some practical answers to players' needs to bridge the gap between the steel string and the classical. A slimmer neck, a pick-up system that is specially voiced for nylon strings and a very good sound all combine to make this instrument a serious contender for anyone wanting to add the subtle charms of the nylon string to their collection. Then there's the price – £466, including a gig bag is very reasonable.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Classical cutaway
Made In: China
Top: Canadian spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 48mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Magnus Pro-NL
Case: Gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

Ortega Guitars
www.ortegaguitars.com

YAMAHA
L SERIES LL16

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 89

{£803}

This guitar is a triumph of research and development as I get the impression here that every single change that Yamaha has made to their already prestigious L Series has been done for a positive reason. The re-voicing, new bracing design, wood upgrades and pickup system all combine to produce a dreadnought that sits easily in the hands while it produces a broad spectrum of contemporary tones. Yamaha has produced an instrument that ticks virtually every box.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Modified dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Engelmann Spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany/rosewood ply
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Passive PU
Case: Pro gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

Yamaha Guitars
www.uk.yamaha.com

YAMAHA
L SERIES LL6

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 89

{£493}

The new refinements to the L Series from Yamaha are very worthwhile and you're sure to be seeing a lot of them in the hands of pro players. We get the impression that all the changes have got purpose and definitely not representative of a reboot just for the sake of it. The thing that impressed us most of all is the passive pickup system which sounds very good indeed and frees players from the drudge of fiddling with batteries and carrying spares when out gigging.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Modified dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Engelmann Spruce
Back and Sides: Laminated rosewood
Neck: Mahogany/rosewood ply
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Passive PU
Case: Pro gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

Yamaha Guitars
www.uk.yamaha.com

KREMONA
RC65CW

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 90

{£370}

There's a keen eye for design at work here that knows what makes a sophisticated, modern instrument that doesn't skimp out on the traditional values that make nylon-strung guitars such a joy to play. The Kremona RC65 CW offers exceptional value for money and should be investigated further by all but the most picky of classical enthusiasts. Kremona is most certainly a very welcome new arrival to the UK guitar scene – and one that you'll be seeing more of in 2015.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Classical
Made In: Bulgaria
Top: Solid spruce
Back and Sides: Laminated walnut
Neck: African mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Neck width at nut: 52mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman Classic 3
Case: Padded case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Sutherland Trading
www.sutherlandtrading.com

TOP 20 GUITARS **UNDER £1,000**

AVIAN
SONGBIRD

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 91

{£899}

What struck us the most was its flexibility and balanced voice that adapted to pretty much everything and we think that's what makes it a winner in our book! Its light and airy voice with a very sweet, focused sound. Chords sound long and sweet and fingerstyle has all the snappiness and dynamics you'd expect or desire. Single notes fare well, too, and so the demi cutaway can be put to its fullest use in those moments where soloing takes you up the dusty end!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Modified jumbo
Made In: China
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 44.45mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: LR Baggs iBeam
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

The North American Guitar
www.thenorthamericanguitar.com

DRL
8-STRING

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 93

{£625 [AS REVIEWED]}

The core tone itself is punchy and clear with superb definition. High notes sparkle with glassy clarity while low notes feel tight and articulate as only a small-bodied guitar can produce. The all-solid construction and scalloped X-bracing combine to produce a very grown up and quality of tone that belies the extraordinary price tag. The DRL 008 is one seriously desirable instrument – sumptuously designed, seriously well-equipped and oozing tone from every pore.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: 00
Made In: Vietnam
Top: AAA-grade Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: AA Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

DRL Guitars
www.drlguitars.co.uk

FARIDA
A-52 JACK STEADMAN

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 94

{£399}

The acoustic sound of the Jack Steadman signature Farida is beautifully bright and clean and there's certainly no lack of bass response, either. In fact this is one of the more remarkable sonic characteristics of the A-52; you'd expect a body size like this one to be a little bit short on bass response, but in fact the opposite is true. I'm really astonished at how much this guitar has to offer for £399 – bags of great tone and very good to play at the same time.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Super-folk
Made In: China
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional LR Baggs
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Dawsons Music
www.dawsons.co.uk

JAMES NELIGAN
DEV-PFI

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 94

{£255}

This would be an excellent guitar for any beginner, but I can even imagine more seasoned players being more than happy picking this up as a second (or third, or fourth or… oh, you get the idea) instrument to expand their collection. It may not have the luxury of a household name plastered across the headstock, but the DEV-PFI remains a hugely impressive little guitar that should push James Neligan ever further into becoming a much more widely recognised and respected name in the guitar world.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Parlour
Made In: China
Top: Solid mahogany
Back and Sides: Laminate mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 629mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman
Case: No £20 optional extra

CONTACT DETAILS:

EMD Music
www.emdmusic.com

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AVALON GUITARS

avalonguitars.com

TOP 20 GUITARS UNDER £1,000

TANGLEWOOD

EVOLUTION

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 99

{£230}

If you are on a budget and looking to expand your collection, you could stop your search right here. For the money, you're getting a charming and responsive instrument that has much to offer aspiring songwriters and guitar enthusiasts alike. You just can't go far wrong with a combination of good looks, great construction, and dependable, expressive tones. The TW28 CSN has all that in spades and even comes with that added mojo of having a real luthier involved in the design process.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Solid cedar
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

TAYLOR

GS MINI MAHOGANY

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 96

{£503}

The neck is very user-friendly; it's broader than you expect, but not in any way chunky and the nut width is the same standard that you would find on thousands of instruments out there. So you're immediately at home and not forced into a change of playing style to suit the guitar's diminutive size. This makes it a nigh on perfect travel guitar – I wouldn't imagine that there's an airline that would put up any serious resistance to carrying the GS Mini on board as hand luggage.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Mini Grand Symphony
Made In: Mexico
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Layered sapele
Neck: Sapele
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 596mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional ES-Go
Case: GS hard gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

Taylor Guitars
www.taylorguitars.com

ANDREW WHITE

CYBELE

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 96

{£400}

The Cybele really does kick out an impressive volume when you go for it, while if you pick it there's a delicate sweetness. It's a handsome guitar with a pretty voice, and it looks damn cool. It's a solid build, with a neat finish and cracking value for money. We love the luthier-built sensibility and the idea that you can get a slice of Andrew White for this price. These guitars cost a fraction of a handmade AW, yet they both still share his excellent attention to detail, build quality, and idiosyncratic flourishes.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Parlour
Made In: Korea
Top: Jatoba
Back and Sides: Jatoba
Neck: Spanish cedar
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 630mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Padded gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

The North American Guitar
www.thenorthamericanguitar.com

FRESHMAN

FA1AM12

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 98

{£400}

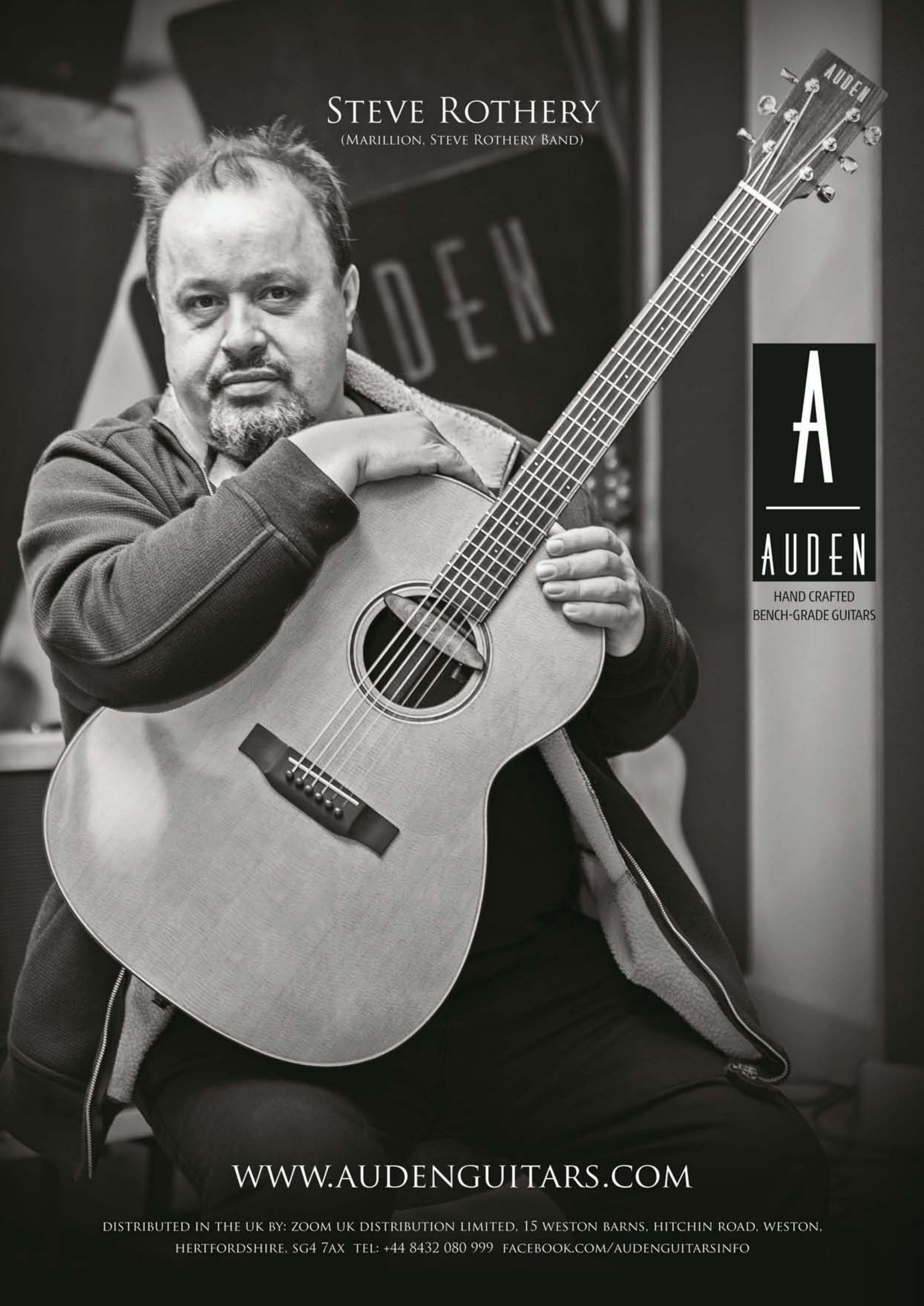
The Freshman FA1's tone is superb. It's incredibly warm and rich – surprising, in view of the slightly smaller body size. Even when we drop tuned the entire guitar to D the warmth remained, with no shortage of nicely proportioned bass response as an additional bonus. Another surprise is that it's relatively easy both to fingerpick and use a plectrum to bring out individual note patterns within chords. A great choice of 12-string for any discerning player.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Folk cutaway
Made In: Asia
Top: Canadian Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Quilted maple
Neck: Maple
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 48mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman Isys 201
Case: Hard gig bag

CONTACT DETAILS:

Freshman Guitars
www.freshmanguitars.net



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TOP 20 GUITARS OVER £1,000

HUSS & DALTON

T-0014

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 97

{£3,499}

This is a fine, well-balanced and comfortable guitar to play. It's a tonal storehouse with a good many tricks up its sleeve, too; and many players who have previously been dismissive of smaller bodied, short scale parlour sized instruments in the past would be well advised to revisit models like this one from Huss & Dalton as it will fulfill many tonal objectives in one very compact package. This guitar doesn't only live up to expectations – it exceeds them!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: 00
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: East Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Gaboon ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 632.4mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: TKL H&D hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Brilliant Distribution
www.brilliantdistribution.co.uk

AVALON

ARD RI L7-700B

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 87

{£5,950}

Certainly, in order to consider spending nearly £6k on a guitar you would have to be a very serious player aiming to place yourself among the pro league and it's been said many times that what you're really paying for is that extra 10% of tonal magic above and beyond what the rank and file can offer. This guitar delivers on every count and would definitely make a worthy investment for any tonehound out there wishing to up their acoustic arsenal on the pro stage.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: Ireland
Top: Redwood
Back and Sides: African Blackwood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hiscox Pro II

CONTACT DETAILS:

Avalon Guitars
www.avalonguitars.com

LARRIVÉE

D-40 LEGACY SERIES

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 88

{£1,249}

There will be very few guitarists out there that could claim to being even slightly disappointed by a guitar like this Larrivée Legacy Series. Put simply, if you're in the market for a new guitar, put this very high on your "must-try" list. Meticulous, immaculate, smart and beautiful – it's everything you could want in a mahogany-backed dread that offers all the clarity and reliability of a modern guitar with the full and dynamic character of a vintage-styled classic.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 1 11/16"
Scale Length: 25.5"
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Sound Technology
www.soundtech.co.uk

MARTIN

000-15M

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£1,099}

Understated, incredible value for money, and boldly in fashion. Its appeal is centre stage at the moment with the all-mahogany trend going full-force. It's uber sexy, no-frills approach makes us covet this guitar unlike many others not just in this price range, but ones which cost a considerable amount more. We'd not think twice about adding this to our guitar collection. It's everything to look for in a guitar: simple, unfussy, great tone, and excellent playability.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: 000 14-fret
Made In: USA
Top: Solid mahogany
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Neck: Solid mahogany
Fingerboard: East Indian rosewood
Neck Width at Nut: 1 11/16"
Scale Length: 25.4"
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Westside Distribution
www.westsidedistribution.com

TOP 20 GUITARS OVER £1,000

GUILD
ORPHEUM

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 92

{£2,819}

The more this guitar is played, the quicker the onset of mellow tone will follow. Considering that it's a custom shop instrument, the price tag isn't at all outrageous – you'd be inclined to buy an instrument like this as an investment both in terms of rising monetary value, but also as an ongoing tonal assault on the senses, too. It sounds great now and I'm sure it would delight the ears of anyone hearing it. But you can be sure that the passage of time will round it into a truly spectacular instrument.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: USA
Top: Adirondack red spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Custom hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Guild Guitars
www.guildguitars.com

FAITH
BOG OAK SIGNATURE SERIES

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 92

{£1,999}

The mix of the Engelmann spruce and bog oak is a great match. The sustain is excellent – chords seem to linger for ages – and the dynamic range is superb in that you can play really quietly without losing any tone or verging towards being too tinny. There's a surprising amount of usable volume on hand, too. It really is first class – and the story it has to tell is priceless. Kudos to Patrick James Eggle and the team at Faith Guitars for this splendid guitar with a great story.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Drop-shouldered dreadnought
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: English bog oak
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Macassar ebony
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 625mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Barnes and Mullins
www.bandm.co.uk

MARTIN
00-42SC JOHN MAYER

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 93

{£6,999}

If playing with a pick is your thing then the 00-42SC rises to the challenge with amazingly well balanced chords – and single notes are crystal clear, sweet and dynamic at the same time. What's more, the shorter scale on the 00-42SC means that bluesy string bending is easy on the fingers, too. Everything you could possibly want from a small body Martin is right here and as far as signature instruments go, this one ranks along with the very best we have ever played!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Grand concert 00
Made In: USA
Top: Premium grade Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Cocobolo
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 47.6mm
Scale Length: 632.4mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Custom shop hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Westside Distribution
www.westsidedistribution.com

COLLINGS
CJ35

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 94

{£4,614}

The combination of a slightly thinner top, vintage style pre-war bracing and all the other golden era features that play a part in this guitar's construction have paid off. There's certainly a sound to the instrument that you would normally associate with that bygone era, but with a definite contemporary edge at the same time. It's a guitar that not only looks the part but one that fits the bill nicely when it comes to that much sought-after pre-war vintage tone.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Collings jumbo
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: African rosewood
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 632mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: TKL hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Collings Guitars
www.collingsguitars.com

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TOP 20 GUITARS **OVER £1,000**

PATRICK JAMES EGGLE

PARLOUR

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£4,400}

A few luthiers seem to have set out to rummage through the history books in order to produce contemporary guitars that have the golden voice of another era. PJE has produced a parlour model that treads the path of yesteryear's manufacturing methods so accurately that it could easily be termed a modern classic in a literal sense. He has managed to call up some of the prime virtues of the older style of building and merged them together in a contemporary instrument with truly remarkable tonal and dynamic ranges.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Parlour
Made In: UK
Top: Honduras mahogany
Back and Sides: Honduras mahogany
Neck: Honduras mahogany
Fingerboard: Brazilian rosewood
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 632mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hiscox hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Patrick James Eggle Guitars
www.eggle.co.uk

ROZAWOOD

28 DREADNOUGHT

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£2,720}

If you're a player who puts tone and build quality first then Rozawood are definitely a company to explore. The 28D really is a very fine sounding guitar and the passage of time will see it turn into a great one. It's loud without being brash, trebly without sounding brittle with a sort of golden sheen to everything it produces. It's fair to say that Martin's D28 is an instrument against which all others are judged and the Rozawood really does enter that hallowed arena with considerable style. Rozawood is a make that deserves your attention.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: Czech Republic
Top: Alpine spruce
Back and Sides: East Indian rosewood
Neck: Honduran mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 644mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Rozawood Guitars
www.rozawood.cz

LOWDEN

OLD LADY

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£4,960}

Quite often you find that signature models are not suitable for the everyman – there are quirks and anomalies present that won't suit everyone – but I didn't notice anything I didn't like about the Old Lady at all from a playing perspective. There's an evenness across the tonal spectrum we were not expecting from what is basically a jumbo cutaway. It's an unfussy instrument totally devoid of unnecessary whistles and bells, focussing instead on pure tone and optimum response.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: Northern Ireland
Top: Red cedar
Back and Sides: Cuban mahogany
Neck: Five-piece mahogany/maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hiscox hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Lowden Guitars
www.georgelowden.com

TAYLOR

810 2014

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£2,519}

The purely acoustic experience it utterly sublime, offering truly exceptional balance across the strings and a seemingly endless array of harmonic overtones at every turn. Every chord is drenched in tone, responding effortlessly to every nuance of your attack. The 810 shows just what can be accomplished when a company like Taylor puts its mind into improving what 99% of the guitar-playing world would have identified as a damn near un-improvable guitar. The knowledge and craftsmanship poured into this instrument is palpable.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Neck Width: 1-3.4"
Scale Length: 25-1/2"
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Deluxe Taylor hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Taylor Guitars
www.taylorguitars.com

LAKEWOOD
M-38 CUSTOM

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£1,900}

The current controversy with tropical woods isn't going to go away and that we're going to see more experimentation with new and unusual timbers as the years pass. It's a thing that definitely has to happen and if the results are as good as we find here then we're confident that the future of acoustic tone is in safe hands. Offering a "full European" option isn't a gimmick, it's a statement that has resulted in a good looking, fine sounding guitar!

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Grand concert
Made In: Germany
Top: European spruce
Back and Sides: Cherry
Neck: Flamed maple
Fingerboard: Plum
Nut Width: 46mm
Scale Length: 653mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hiscox Lakewood hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Lakewood Guitars
www.lakewood-guitars.com

ATKIN
WHITE RICE RELIC

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 97

{£2,999}

When subjected to the plectrum test, chomping on chords, the guitar really springs to life – and we can totally endorse Alister's comment about this instrument being "an absolute cannon". There's just something mysterious and enchanting about it, and when you think about the amazing players it pays tribute to, that's not too surprising! It's a dreadnought with heaps of tone and charm. The name "White Rice" came about because the guitars is modelled after the Martin D-28 that was once owned by Clarence White, then latterly, Tony Rice.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: UK
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: Hiscox hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Atkin Guitars
www.atkinguitars.com

COLLINGS
0002H KOA

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 96

{£5,899}

It's the kind of instrument that would record fabulously well as its acoustic voice really is superb with bags of depth, character and a surprising amount of maturity, seeing as it's relatively fresh off the workshop bench. Collings guitars are superb in every sense of the word. Koa is a fine exotic wood from Hawaii and promises plenty of the warmth and sweetness associated with this particular timber. Combine that with a small body and the attention to detail for which Collings is famed and you have an intriguing package.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: 000
Made In: USA
Top: Hawaiian koa
Back and Sides: Hawaiian koa
Neck: Honduras mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 46mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Dave Mann Music
www.davemann.co.uk

LAME HORSE
LH14

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 98

{£5,500}

With its 1.65" nut width and shorter scale length, the LH14 is effortlessly playable, with a perfect set up. It's a fingerpicker's dream, loud and clear, with excellent separation. It has some of the dry, woodiness of mahogany, but with a richer mid-range. Trebles are fat and solid and there's a great dynamic range, with the guitar responding equally well to a light touch or to the player really digging in. Small body, big tone – meet the Lame Horse LH14 Lorena.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Slope-shouldered
Made In: USA
Top: Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: Sapele
Neck: Mahogany/maple laminate
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 1.65"
Scale Length: 25"
Onboard Electronics: Optional
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

The North American Guitar
www.thenorthamericanguitar.com

TOP 20 GUITARS **OVER £1,000**

SANTA CRUZ

OM CUSTOM SHOP

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 99

{£5,199}

We've been rendered speechless by the excellence of Santa Cruz instruments before and it has happened again here. The build quality of this guitar is of an incredibly high standard and the thought that you can build in your own custom variations into a variety of body shapes is an amazing asset for anyone who is still seeking perfection from an instrument. Most players would find this guitar an absolute delight.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: OM
Made In: USA
Top: Italian spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 644.5mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Ameritage hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Ivor Mairants
www.ivormairants.co.uk

AUDEN

CHESTER CEDAR

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 99

{£1,499}

The Chester itself is an engaging and rewarding instrument to play, and one that is sure to return years of enjoyment. Smart, modern and thoroughly classy – this is a guitar that not only begs to be played, but demands it. If you have the opportunity to try one, embrace it with both hands – I very much doubt you'll be disappointed. Auden deserves success for coming up with not only an excellent guitar, but an excellent guitar company.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: 000
Made In: China
Top: AAA cedar
Back and Sides: Solid Indian rosewood
Neck: African mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Schertler Lydia
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Auden Guitars
www.audenguitars.com

COLE CLARK

AN3EC-RDRW

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 99

{£3,739}

Sound-wise, it has a lot to say for itself. Acoustically, it will quite possibly find favour among the Celtic music enthusiasts and when you power up the clever on board electronics, virtually anything becomes possible. The modern tappers and slappers will find the sensor and mic combo fun to work with, but the melodists will be happy with the amount of control they have available at the turn of a dial. We were impressed by the Angel 2, and this is a worthy addition to the range.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Grand auditorium
Made In: Australia
Top: Californian redwood
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Queensland maple silkwood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Cole Clark 3-way
Case: Cole Clark hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

The Zed Music Café
www.thezedmusiccafe.com

WEE LOWDEN

40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

RATING: 4.6/5 **ISSUE:** 99

{£4,550}

We were surprised by how much volume you could get from a small body and the bass response seems to have at once a darker tonal quality to it and quite a lot of added projection at the same time. With this sort of build quality and attention to detail where the sound is concerned, the Wee Lowden really hits the spot. True to say that it is not cheap, but Lowden users know to expect nothing short of excellence from the brand and so I doubt anyone will be disappointed after spending some time with one.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Small-bodied
Made In: Northern Ireland
Top: Redwood
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Five-piece mahogany/rosewood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 610mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Lowden Hiscox

CONTACT DETAILS:

Lowden Guitars
www.lowdenguitars.com

OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

TANGLEWOOD
TWB 24M5

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 95

{£299}

One of the very best things about playing guitar is that you can (relatively) easily transition one set of skills from one instrument to another. Whether you fancy trying out life on the heavy side with a full-blown electric, sliding away on a lapsteel or transcribing 'Bohemian Rhapsody' down to ukulele size, there's plenty us six-stringers can apply ourselves to and as the TWB 24 M5 from Tanglewood shows – it doesn't have to cost you the earth. Of course, there's every bit a chance that you're only interested in the banjo, too!

NEED TO KNOW

Head: Remo renaissance
Made In: China
Resonator: Maple
Back and Sides: Maple
Neck: Maple
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Tone Ring: Alloy
Scale Length: 670mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

NATIONAL RESOPHONIC
STYLE 1 TRICONE

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 89

{£2,699}

The whole experience of playing the Style 1 has reminded us how much we love resonators and exactly why National enjoy one of the most enviable reputations in the business for producing these types on instruments. For a company with the heritage of National, this is exactly the kind of guitar that deserves to be leading the company's image and reputation, a talisman for all that makes the resonator great. In that regard, the National Resophonic Style 1 Tricone really is faultless.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Parlour
Made In: USA
Resonator: Three six-inch cones
Back and Sides: Brass
Neck: Spanish cedar
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 1.825mm
Scale Length: 25-21/32"
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Frailers
www.frailers.com

FAIRFIELD
BANJO

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 89

{£2,800}

The Fairfield banjo sounds great, ticking every box for sounds, playability, and construction along the way. As with guitars, the price is representative of the amount of care, attention and pure hands-on attention that has gone into its manufacture. It's also been fully and thoughtfully researched at the point of design and those contemporary tweaks like the wider fingerboard do make a great deal of difference. It's a great banjo for the player looking for that little bit extra.

NEED TO KNOW

Made In: UK
Model: Standard resonator banjo
Rim Diameter: 295mm
Rim: Maple
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 34mm
Scale Length: 670mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: Fitted hard case

CONTACT DETAILS:

Fairfield Banjos
www.fairfieldbanjos.com

KREMONA
MARI UKULELE

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 92

{£269}

It's hard not to be impressed by Kremona. For a relatively unheard of company it is making some capable instruments at sensible prices that could put many of its rivals to shame. The combination of good design along with great playability and value is an incredibly hard one to pull of with regularity and Kremona deserves full respect for pulling it off. The Mari feels like it has been designed with a real uke player in mind rather than someone who is simply buying one for the sake of it.

NEED TO KNOW

Body Size: Tenor
Made In: Bulgaria
Top: Solid mahogany
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Nut Width: 36mm
Scale Length: 430mm
Onboard Electronics: No
Case: No

CONTACT DETAILS:

Sutherland Trading
www.sutherlandtrading.com

ELECTRONICS AND ACCESSORIES

TANGLEWOOD

T3

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 87

{£250}

While tone-chasers with slightly deeper pockets will definitely want to check out the T6 before going any further, the T3 is without a doubt a superb amplifier. It punches above its weight in just about every way imaginable, and we were completely bowled over by its considerable charms.

NEED TO KNOW

Power output: 30w with six-inch woofer
Built-in effects: Hall, plate, chorus, delay
Inputs: jack (6.35mm) CH 1 Input, CH 2 Input, AUX in (RCA), MP3 in (3.5mm), tuner out, line out, DI out (XLR), phones out

CONTACT DETAILS:

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

SHADOW

PANAMAG

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 98

{£349}

The ability to become a wandering player in the truest sense and move freely around the stage without fear of entwining yourself in guitar cable is a tempting option to have, and the PanaMag's price compares favourably to other retrofitted soundhole pickups.

NEED TO KNOW

Model: PanaMag Wireless System
Features: Stereo pickup with panorama control for stereo/mono operation, EQ for treble & bass strings, chromatic tuner, 30m range, rechargeable LI-ION battery, fits most acoustic guitar soundholes.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Barnes and Mullins
www.bandm.co.uk

ULTRASOUND

CP-100

RATING: 4.5/5 **ISSUE:** 97

{£550}

In 1972, music shop owner Dean Markley started making his own range of strings, later followed by the Voice Box pedal, made famous by Peter Frampton. 42 years later, strings continue to be one of their key markets, but they also play in the world of amplifiers. The CP-100 is sensibly spec'd, strongly built, handsome and easy to use. Try the CP-100; you won't kick yourself for buying it, but try the competition too.

NEED TO KNOW

Power: 100w, eight-inch speaker
Channels: Two
Effects: 16 digital effects
Bass and treble controls on both channels
16"W x 12"H x 11"D

CONTACT DETAILS:

Dean Markley
www.deanmarkley.com

GOPRO

MUSIC EDITION

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 97

{£360}

Even using the built-in mic, the sound was really very presentable and I think that, with a few more experiments and a couple of settings tweaks, we would have something really serviceable. We could have produced something seriously slick with almost no effort at all. The GoPro Hero3+ is the absolute epitome of easy to use hardware. It's not cheap, but you certainly get what you pay for!

NEED TO KNOW

Model: Hero 3+ Music Edition
Features: Automatic low light, ultra wide angle lens, photo, time lapse photo option, mic, wi-fi, app remote compatibility – and much more! H.264 codec, .mp4 format

CONTACT DETAILS:

GoPro
www.gopro.com

G7TH

PERFORMANCE 2 CAPO

RATING: 5/5 **ISSUE:** 94

{£30-£40}

After 10 years at the cutting edge of capo design, the Performance has had a redesign. The new version is slimmer and the clutch system has been reversed so that now you merely squeeze the plastic switch and the top of the capo to release it from the neck. This means that moving the capo to various fret locations in between songs has never been faster. If you haven't yet succumbed to the charms of the G7th Performance capo, go get one– you'll be impressed!

NEED TO KNOW

Available in three colours:
Original silver: £29.95
Black: £29.95
18ct gold plate: £39.35

CONTACT DETAILS:

G7th Capos
www.g7th.com

WOLFRAM

MARTIN SIMPSON SLIDE

RATING: 4.8/5 **ISSUE:** 93

{£250}

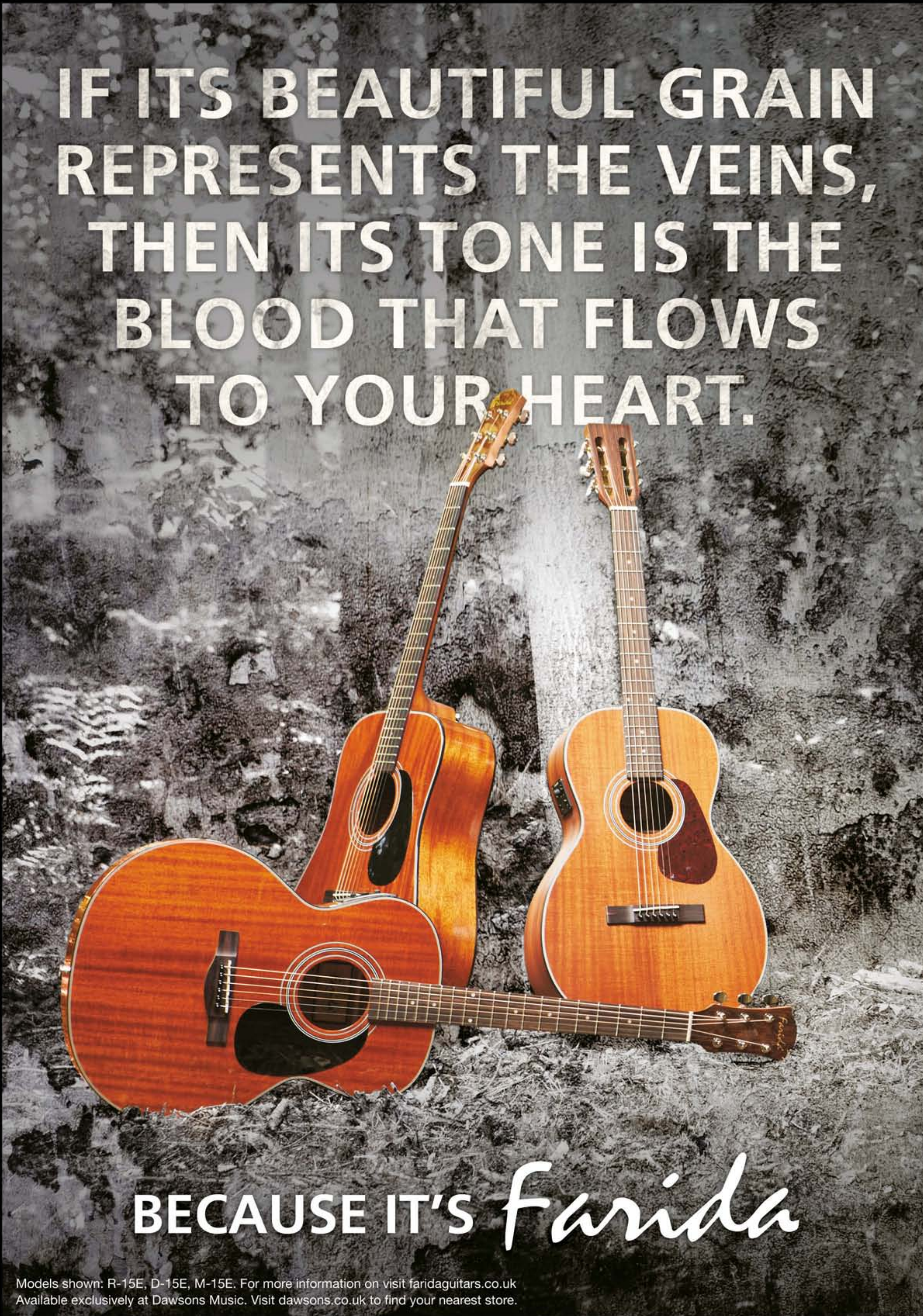
Martin Simpson's slide is indeed very heavy, weighing in at around 190g. It's also been specially shaped so that the inside tapers, meaning that it's a thinner bore at the tip. This fits on the finger nicely and actually feels very comfortable, once you get used to the weight. Plus, there's virtually no surface noise. Many people associate the sound of slide guitar with the sound of metal on metal grinding underneath the note, but here all you get is an incredibly pure tone.

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Wolfram
Material: Hand-polished tungsten carbide
Weight: 192g
Length: 64mm

CONTACT DETAILS:

Wolfram Slides
www.wolframslides.com


IF ITS BEAUTIFUL GRAIN REPRESENTS THE VEINS, THEN ITS TONE IS THE BLOOD THAT FLOWS TO YOUR HEART.
BECAUSE IT'S Farida
Models shown: R-15E, D-15E, M-15E. For more information on visit faridaguitars.co.uk
Available exclusively at Dawsons Music. Visit dawsons.co.uk to find your nearest store.

R-15E Richtone

Top: Solid Mahogany
Back & Side: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Sonokelin
Bridge: Sonokelin

D-15E Dreadnought

Top: Solid Mahogany
Back & Side: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Sonokelin
Bridge: Sonokelin

M-15E Parlour

Top: Solid Mahogany
Back & Side: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Bridge: Rosewood

HUDSON TAYLOR

SINGING FOR STRANGERS

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Set to release their hotly anticipated debut album *Singing For Strangers* in February 2015, Irish sibling duo Hudson Taylor has spent the last five years honing their infectious brand of music – and in doing so, going from busking the streets of their native Dublin to playing huge festivals across the UK and abroad – and signing with a major label.

The brothers, Alfie and Harry (Hudson Taylor is their surname) have become favourites on the live scene for their energetic shows, impeccable Simon & Garfunkel-like harmonies, and songwriting prowess with delicately picked guitar lines and anthemic choruses. Prior to being signed, they released their first EP *Battles* in 2012, followed by *Cinematic Lifestyle* in the same year, and then *Osea* in October 2013. 'Chasing Rubies' is the first single to be taken from *Singing For Strangers*, although many fans will have heard this from their YouTube page, live shows – and at the London Acoustic Guitar Show in 2013.

We can't get enough of Hudson Taylor, so we caught up with Alfie and Harry at the Cambridge Folk Festival in the summer to talk about their busking days, supporting Jake Bugg, and the anticipation of releasing a debut album. It's hard not to be charmed by Hudson Taylor's infectious enthusiasm – something the packed out tent at Cambridge Folk Festival were subject to.

'There were quite a lot of young people here at Cambridge, and I think that is where our main audience is right now,' Harry says in his lilting Irish accent. 'The last time we played Cambridge was in a tent called the Dome which was too small for the crowd – they had to open the tent right up so people up the hill could see and hear us as well, it was magic. This year we moved up to the second stage.'

'It feels like things are taking off for us with every show we play,' adds younger brother Alfie. 'I think it always feels like that with every gig we play. We feel that we learn something new every time we go out on stage.'

'It does feel fantastic to be playing the major festivals,' Harry continues, 'because we know that the competition to get onto those stages is just massive, so we are so proud to be able to be included. Even when we went to festivals as fans just a few years ago, we always loved the atmosphere. We used to say to ourselves: "That must be so much fun, if only it could be us up there doing that" – and now it is. And we absolutely don't take anything for granted, and I think the people can see that.'

Cutting their teeth as buskers in Dublin, honing their skills in such a tough environment, paved the way for the enthralling showmanship you see at a Hudson Taylor concert – grabbing people's attention, singing for strangers, and turning everyone they meet into fans along the way.

'It's always about grabbing the attention of the audience. You have to make them want to stop and have a look and a listen to what you are doing. Harry would jump up on bins, swing around lampposts – anything to get the attention of the audience, make us stand out, and get us noticed. We would stand out on Grafton Street in Dublin and I would be playing the guitar standing on one leg, and people would wonder what was gong on. Why is that guy swinging of a lamp post, and why is that other guy standing on one leg? Anything to be different and stand out from the rest of the street musicians and entertainers around us,' Alfie reflects. 'It quickly did occur to us that we could do this for a living because we were quite savvy with social media, and people began to connect seeing us on the streets with seeing us on YouTube. That got us some interest, and that led to some gigs, and things just grew from there. Some nights it would all turn into a huge street party.'

'I started playing before Alfie,' Harry says. 'We got this Aria guitar given to us by a friend, and it had a really rusty set of strings on it, and we didn't change those strings for about 18

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ADDITIONAL VIDEO CONTENT

months. I have no idea why we never did change those strings, but it made learning to play a real baptism of fire because the action was so hard, and the strings were almost impossible to get any movement from; it was a real struggle. We got pretty proficient at hammering chords out on these really ropy strings so when we did get some new strings it just felt like heaven, it was so much easier.'

'We were looking for a company who could help us out, obviously we were not in any position to go buying anything really expensive – or even a little bit expensive,' Alfie adds. 'We contacted Martin and Gibson – and all the other big companies – and asked if they could help us out. They were really kind and offered us models, but even then, the cost was way out of our reach. We then heard about Freshman Guitars after finding them online. We did some research and found that they used some of the same woods and manufacturing processes as some of the bigger companies, but they were more within our range, so we hooked up with them, and now we have around 18 Freshman guitars between us.'

'We have some other guitars that we've picked up on our travels, too,' Harry continues. 'Alfie has a Gibson J45 from the 1930s which is a wonderful guitar. We went in Norm's Vintage Guitar shop in Los Angeles the first time we got out there, and it is just packed with fabulous old guitars. In exchange for us playing a few songs in the shop for his YouTube page, he did us some really good discounts on some guitars.'

'We're always sitting down together, jamming with guitars,' Harry says of the brothers' songwriting. 'Nine times out of 10, an idea will pop up out of it and become something we can work with. Alfie will start scatting, just throwing out odd words and phrases and, almost instinctively, I will start harmonising with him. When the harmonies make us feel little tingles up the back of our necks, we know we are on to something and we can start to pursue that and work it into something.'

'There is an intuition between us as brothers,' Alfie adds, 'and that can be quite strange at times, but it works well for us. We can be jamming away together and I know which chord I am going to go to, and I can feel that Harry knows as well, and he will follow me, and then he does. It can be something totally unlike anything we have done before, but that instinct just kicks in. It's always good having an iPhone around because I always have so many ideas around in my head for lyrics and for tunes as well, it's great to be able to get them down before they all disappear.'

Part of Hudson Taylor's career trajectory saw the duo chosen as support for Jake Bugg; a tour that meant the brothers would be playing to arenas every night. 'We got to go out for four weeks with Jake, he had heard about us because we share an agent, and that was great. And then he invited us as his main tour support for his autumn tour in October. We learned a lot from watching him; he is a really great songwriter and guitar player, so we enjoyed watching him from that point of view – and also how he worked a crowd each night, that was interesting to see as well,' Alfie says.

With such a lively stage sound – and show – how would the brothers go about capturing the sprit and charm of Hudson Taylor on *Singing For Strangers*? 'We got there in the end, but it was something of a struggle. We found it quite hard to capture what we do on record; to get the feel and the atmosphere of how we want to sound. The best recordings we have done have been the ones we did of ourselves when we were at home, but that's probably because it's familiar, and we feel comfortable and relaxed,' says Harry.

'We find it can feel artificial working in a studio,' Alfie adds. 'If things are cut up too much, we lose that feeling of excitement and spontaneity that we always want to have. One of the best people we have worked with is Iain Archer, who produced Jake Bugg's first album. He's Irish, so we felt an empathy with him as a person that helped us a lot when we worked with him.'

'Sometimes we have had to do three or four takes of one song and by take four, you are starting to lose some of the enthusiasm, and you're trying to work out what was wrong the first three times – and maybe its hard to leave out a bit of an earlier take that you liked and you felt worked okay. So, I guess it has been hard work, but again, we are learning as we go.'

With talent and appeal in abundance, there is little doubt that Hudson Taylor's *Singing For Strangers* will meet the anticipation that it so deserves. They're no overnight sensations, they've worked hard for years and 2015 will undoubtedly be theirs.

'We have been signed to a major label for two years and we are just ready to put out an album,' says Alfie. 'We have been very lucky to get touring experience with Jake, and be able to go out and gig on our own. If we had gone on the Jake Bugg tour without the experience we have had playing live, we would never have survived it.'

'Hearing everyone sing our songs back to us is such an inspiration for me,' Alfie finishes. 'We have got the album done now, it'll be out in February 2015, and then it's all about the live dates to go with it.'

Hudson Taylor's 'Chasing Rubies' is out now. Their debut album Singing For Strangers *is out in February 2015.*
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WORDS: JOEL MCIVER IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

***Tony McManus** held crowds rapt at this year's London Acoustic Guitar Show with his miraculous playing and atmospheric music. **Joel McIver** meets the maestro.*

'That was lovely, I really enjoyed it,' smiles Tony McManus, Irish-born, Canada-resident Celtic guitarist extraordinaire, as he bounds off the Main Stage at the London Acoustic Guitar Show. 'I warn you, though: I'm on Toronto time – which is maybe five or six hours behind the UK. I'm pretty tired.'

McManus has no need to worry. As we sit down to chat in the green room backstage, he's animated an interviewee as any journo could hope for, which is just as well because *Acoustic's* first question is the dependable (but boring) one about the luscious-looking acoustic that he was playing on stage a minute ago. Fortunately, his answer is anything but mundane.

'That was my signature Paul Reed Smith,' he says. 'I have a great relationship with those guys. They started producing prototype acoustic guitars around 2005, and Paul's go-to guy in acoustic world is [American bluegrass legend] Ricky Skaggs. Ricky invited me to his studio in Nashville in 2006 and said 'I have some guitars I want to show you' and I said 'okay'. There was no name on their headstocks, so I gave them a play and thought, 'What are these? They're incredibly loud, incredibly balanced and really beautiful'. He said 'These are by Paul Reed Smith: he's making acoustic guitars now'. At the time, that seemed a bit like Ferrari making a motorbike, you know...'

He continues: 'I had a gig in Memphis that day, so I drove off scratching my head and wondering why Ricky had shown me these guitars. Then he called a couple of months later and said 'They've built one for me' and then Paul himself called. He said 'Am I talking to Tony?' and I said 'Yep!' and he said 'My name's Paul Smith, I'm a guitar builder'. I thought, 'Like the way Henry Ford is a car mechanic...' and that was the start of it.'

'We talked and talked on the phone, and he sent me a guitar and I gave him some feedback. The circle of acoustic PRS players grew: I introduced my buddy Martin Simpson to Paul, and Tommy Emmanuel had a couple of the early prototypes as well. Eventually I became the test pilot for them when they were officially launched in 2009. A couple of years after that PRS did a signature model for me, which was a great honour. They're wonderful people to work with and their guitars are astounding.'

There's no sign of transatlantic jet lag as McManus gets into his stride about his frankly magnificent "Private Stock" instrument. As he enthuses, 'Because PRS had been electric guitar makers beforehand, my feedback about the first prototypes was essentially that they would be perfect acoustic guitars for electric players. They had a narrow neck profile. I needed the fingerboard to be a little bit wider, but that was basically my only suggestion: I bowed to their wisdom when it came to bracing patterns and so on. They're such beautiful guitars, and so versatile. Mine does everything I need a single guitar to do. I can play fingerstyle, I can flatpick with it, I can put the capo halfway up the neck, I can tune it way down. I have the bottom string down to A, beyond a baritone guitar!'

Does McManus take a backup guitar on the road with him, we wonder? After all, his picking technique is both fast and percussive, and if you break a string mid-gig... 'Yes, but I can restring pretty quickly!' he chuckles. 'I have it down to a fine art. D'Addario, whose phosphor bronze strings I use because they're incredibly consistent, sent me this little string-winding attachment that you can put on a drill. Every luthier on the planet knows about these things, but when I got it I was changing strings for the sheer joy of it. I like to have new strings pretty much every gig anyway. I did a 45-minute set today, but if I'm doing a full hour and a half, the strings are pretty beat up because I change tunings a lot.'

'Anyway, generally I do travel with one guitar unless I'm driving to a gig, when I'll throw a few things in the car. Actually I was on the road last month with one guitar, and I was headed to a festival in France – and Air France lost my guitar en route! It was gone for four days, so I called Mr Smith and he sent me one.'

Moving beyond the tools of the trade, the actual music McManus plays is truly spellbinding, whether on his most recent album *Mysterious Boundaries* or on any of its six predecessors released since 1998. Drawing on a rich cultural heritage and translating it into powerful, textured guitar music, he moves from relatively simple, sparse chords to extremely complex lines that provide a serious workout for both his fretting and picking hands. Watching McManus on stage, you wonder how long he takes to warm up before he hits the stage every night.

'I like to warm up if I can, but I don't have specific exercises that I do,' he muses. 'In fact, I have specific exercises that I teach but I generally don't do myself... There's one that involves going up the scale chromatically in octaves. That gets your fingers moving independently, and I often do that one. I play a lot, but I'm not focused and I don't tend to work on the difficult stuff. Even if I screw something up on stage I tend not to think about it until I'm playing the same tune the following night.'

How do his nails take the strain, we ask? 'I go to a beautician's once a month and I get them coated in acrylic,' he replies. 'You dip a paintbrush in alcohol and then into this white powder, which dissolves into a gloop that you paint onto the nail and it sets rock hard quickly. Then you file them down to whatever length you need. They're really strong. It's a lifetime commitment, though, because you really ruin your own nails: they turn to putty!'

So to the big question. For the benefit of any readers who, like your interviewer, are some way off from being able to pick with the immense speed and precision of McManus's playing, how do we work towards it? 'Pick a simple tune,' he answers without hesitation. 'A lot of really good fingerstyle players are adept at arranging pop tunes. It's not something I've done a great deal of, but it's an effective route into that style of playing. In the States I wouldn't be considered a fingerstyle player, because the term means different things in different places and I don't do the alternate bass thing. I can't do it, or not in a complex way anyway.'

'It's actually all about luck,' he adds. 'The triplet thing I do with my thumb, which catches a lot of people's attention, is me using my thumbnail like a flatpick. That's just a matter of expediency, and it's become part of my repertoire. You know, back in 1987, when I wasn't close to the guitar player I am today, I was told to go and see this amazing American guitar player, Isaac Guillory, whose name I didn't recognise. It was a life-altering experience: I played a couple of tunes with him, and he was incredibly encouraging to me. That kind of thing really helped me find the way to where I am now.'

He explains: 'My material is drawn from a vast well of Celtic music – mostly Scottish and Irish, but also Breton and Galician. That's the source, for me, and my focus is getting the music to where it sits within that idiom. I'm not in the business of trying to create more guitar music – not that there's a problem with that – but I want to bring the guitar into the fold rather than take music and apply it to the guitar.'

'For me, it's a question of trying to make music idiomatic. What I mean is that I basically adapt the ornamentation of instruments like fiddles and flutes and the human voice to the guitar. The act of trying to do that will create this approach to the music. Think about the guitar like that, and you'll find where you need to go.'

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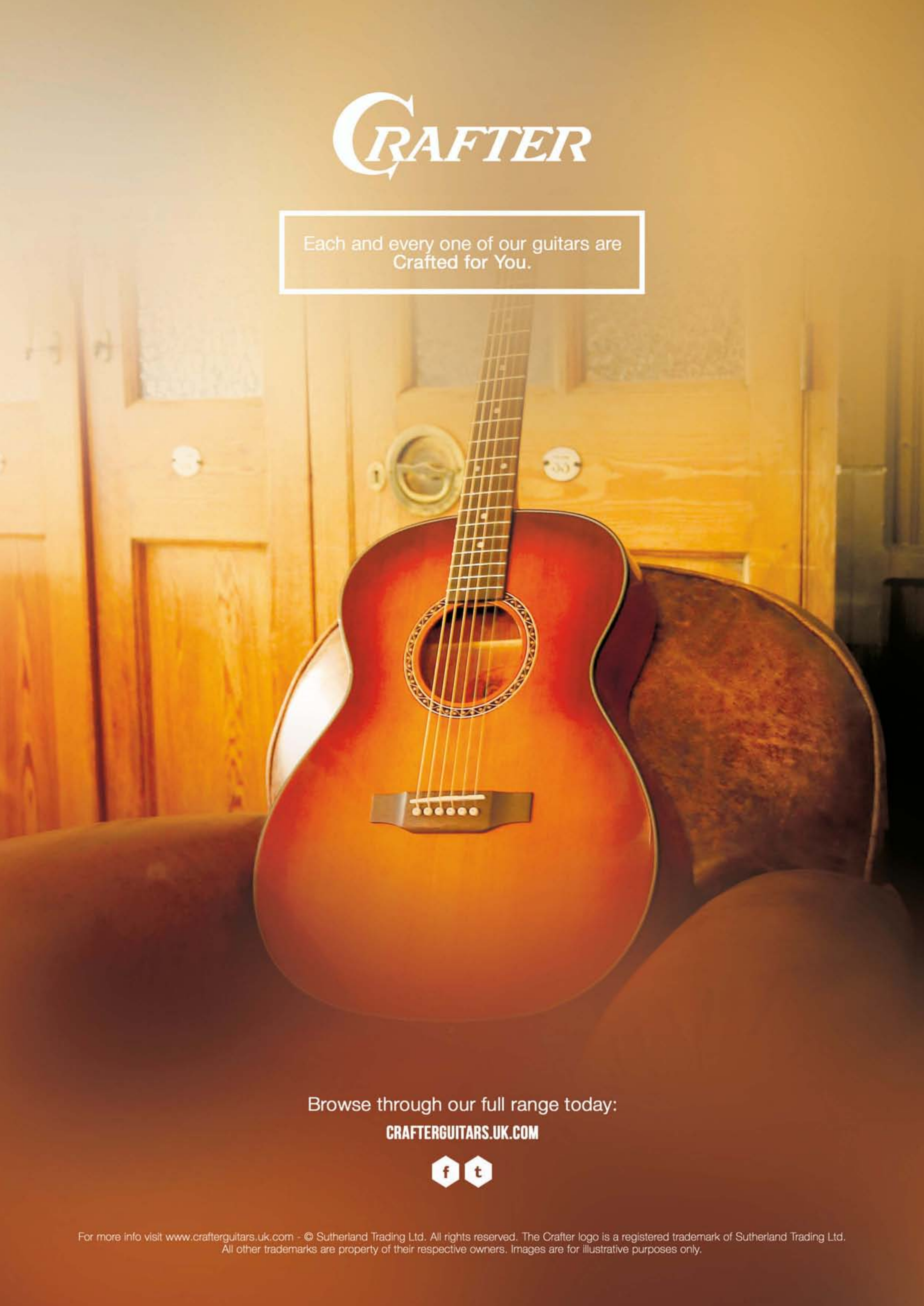

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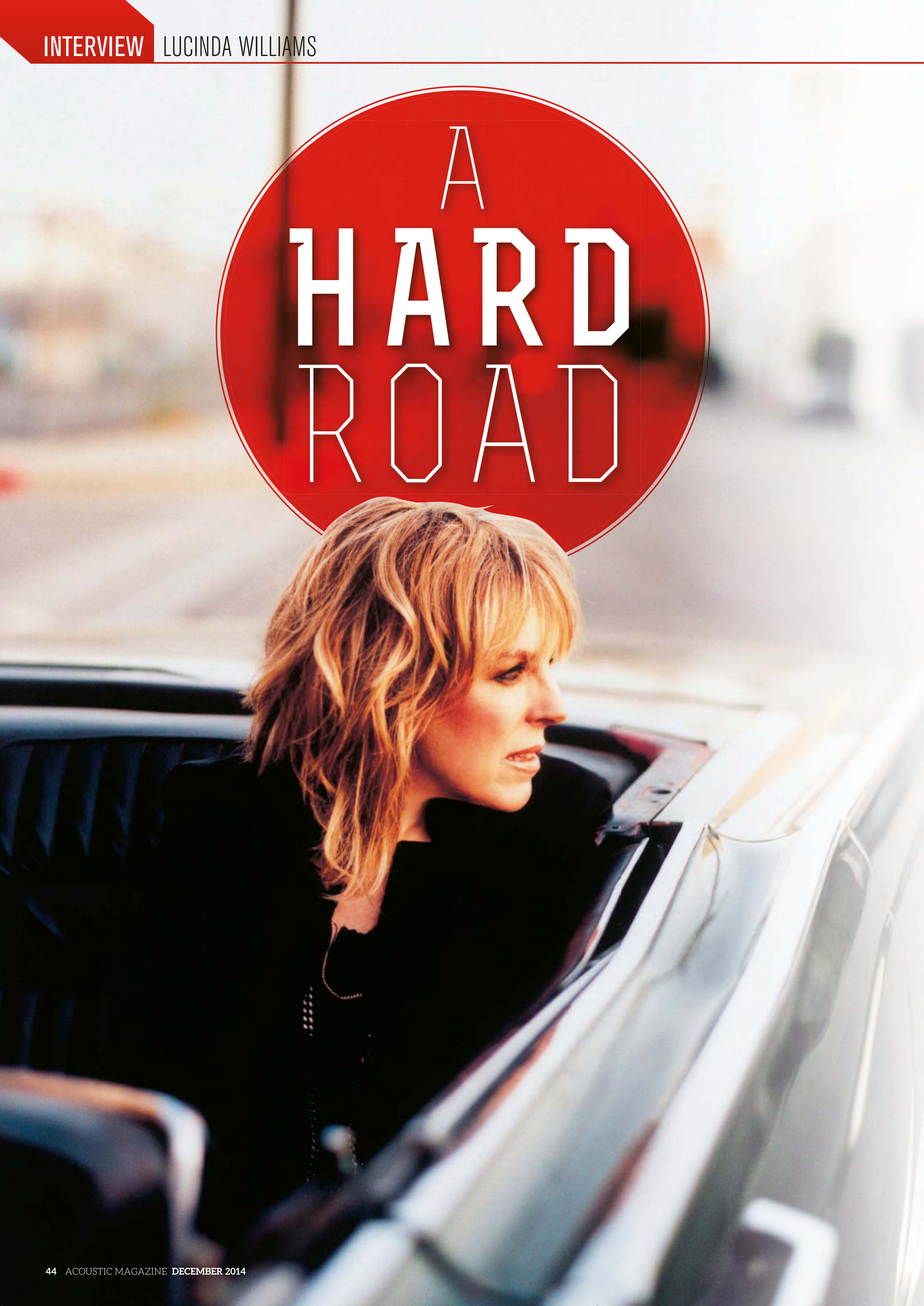
A HARD ROAD



Lucinda Williams' story should give inspiration to singer-songwriters throughout the land. After scuffling in New Orleans, Austin, and Houston, it took 25 years and four albums to find acclaim with her Americana classic ***Car Wheels On A Gravel Road****. She talks to Acoustic about her hard road to success and new album.*

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER **IMAGES:** LUCINDAWILLIAMS.COM

'I'm getting ready to fly to Nashville tomorrow for the Americana Music Festival,' Lucinda Williams' slurred Louisiana voice crackles down the phone line from her California home.

Nashville's favourite wayward daughter, the queen of alt-country, and inheritor of the kind of renegade outlaw stance once the property of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, is getting set to rock the rafters of the City Winery a few days later.

Hers is a voice that cannot be ignored. Steeped in the folk imagery and sounds of the South, her mournful singing and heartfelt songs echo the spiritual essence of musicians that once haunted the Louisiana and Mississippi back roads. But when she gets low down and greasy, grinning as she hammers out guitar-based country rock with her band, the result is a glorious gumbo of delta, Appalachia and Texas honky tonk music – with Williams coming over like some renaissance Hank Williams.

Her latest double album *Down Where The Spirit Meets The Bone*, recorded at the venerable age of 61, is arguably her finest hour. Beginning with the softly sung 'Compassion', a graceful poem by her father, she works through a mammoth 20-song set that explores her familiar human themes – civil wars of the heart, a fall from grace, empathy for the underdog – before bringing it all back home with J.J. Cale's 'Magnolia' – an understated homage to her home state. That she should hit an artistic peak at a time when many artists of her stature are sitting back and colour matching their Ferraris, to long term Lucinda Williams admirers, this should of course come as no surprise. Just about everything she's ever done has always been on the late side. Her first album was recorded when she was 25 years old, and it took her breakthrough album *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road*, to finally launch her career 20 years later.

Emmylou Harris was once quoted as saying that Lucinda Williams was "an example of the best of what country at least says it is, but for some reason was completely out of the loop." So I began by asking, just how things currently were between her and music city.

'Well, I still have a love-hate relationship with Nashville,' she laughs. 'But that has to do with the commercial side of country music, and the CMA show I'm playing is all about rootsy Americana, which encompasses a lot of different styles of music. I lived there in the 90s and back then there wasn't much of an alternative scene, but now all these younger artists and kids have moved in, there are cool rock clubs and restaurants, and the whole thing has become much more cosmopolitan. There are people in Nashville you wouldn't expect to find, like Jack White, one of the guys from the Black Keys lives there, and the guitar player from the Wallflowers who plays in my band. The old country thing is another world and it's still there, but it doesn't dominate the city as much as it used to.'

> "I bash the hell out of my guitars with my belt buckle on the back and my metal finger picks. I'm not a purist and I don't like having something that's too delicate."

Born in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Lucinda Williams' father was an academic and poet. The celebrated Southern writer Flannery O'Connor acted as his mentor, and while her memories are sketchy – she was just four years old at the time – I suggest that given her early colourful life, she could well be a character straight out of the pages of one of O'Connor's books…

'Oh yeah,' she laughs. 'I discovered her writing when I was a kid, and read everything I could get my hands on; I became absorbed with her work and identified with it so much. But despite my father wanting me to go to college, my big dream from when I was a young kid and began playing guitar was just to play music and be able to do it for a living.'

In 1972, while visiting her mother in New Orleans, lured by the sights and sounds of the Big Easy, she managed to pick up a regular gig on Bourbon Street. 'I was in between semesters in college, wandering around the French Quarter and found out about this place called Andy's – guess someone told me about it or something. It was pretty crazy, just a small bar with a little PA system, and I just sat on a stool and sang into a microphone. Strip clubs surrounded the place, open all night – I think they opened at three and closed at three in the morning – and you only got paid in tips. I played some of the traditional stuff that ended up on my first album, and a lot of contemporary folk by people like Bob Dylan and Donovan, just about anything really. Back then it was pretty easy to sustain yourself as a musician because rent was cheap. When they offered me a regular gig I was over the moon. I called my dad because I was supposed to go back to school in the fall and told him I wanted to stay down there. I often think about that as being the biggest turning point in my life. What if he'd said no? I don't know what would have happened.'

After scuffling around working day jobs in Austin and Houston to support her music, her first break came when in 1978 she recorded a low budget album for the obscure Folkways label.

'That was funny. When I was in New Orleans I became friends with a singer-songwriter called Jeff Ampolsk, who'd moved to New York City where he'd made a record for Folkways called *God, Guts and Guns*. He thought Folkways might also be interested in recording me, so I sent him a cassette tape of some songs, which he played to Mo Ash. They sent me back a one-page contract for $250, and through a real close friend of my dad who knew an engineer at Malaco studios in Jackson, Mississippi,

I recorded the album in one afternoon. I had some of my own songs but because it was Folkways, I thought they'd just want to hear more traditional material.'

Two years later, a second Folkways album *Happy Woman* followed. This time around the songs were Williams' own, but despite being described by Rolling Stone as "wonderful", the record failed to make any impact. It wasn't until Lucinda relocated to Los Angeles in 1984, that the music industry began to prick up its ears. 'That's when I started to flourish as a songwriter,' she admits. 'Playing around wherever I could, I began getting some attention from labels and agents sniffing around.'

Eventually heard by the head of A&R at Sony, Lucinda landed what was politely called a "development deal". 30 years later, she remembers feeling "on top of the world".

'I was thinking: "Wow, I don't have to work a day job for six months, all I have to do is write songs, and come up with a demo tape." I had a little apartment and thought: "Boy, I've made it now." The whole idea as I understood it, was that once I came up with the songs, the A&R guy would then take that tape to his colleagues, and they would decide about a record deal.'

Despite working with some fine musicians, including the keyboard player from NRBQ and Garth Hudson from the Band, Sony passed on signing her. 'Nobody knew how to market what I was doing; they said it fell in a crack between country and rock. There was no Americana or alternative anything at that time, I guess I was a little bit ahead of my time.'

But the songs on the demo tape eventually ended up in the hands of Rough Trade Records' Robin Hurley. Looking to expand its music operations, the company had opened an office in Sausalito, California.

'Robin called me up and said: "We love your songs, and we love your voice. Do you want to make a record?" And that's how that happened. They didn't even see me play, but at the time they were trying to expand their roster a little bit with all different kinds of artists. That was important because I'd been turned down not only by all the major labels, but by the smaller labels like Rounder, Sugar Hill, Rhino….' she laughs.

Lucinda still remembers having one particularly painful meeting with an A&R man from Elektra Records, who told her she should "go back to the drawing board".

'This guy said my songs just weren't formulaic enough, didn't have clearly defined bridges or choruses. I was pretty pissed off at the time, but dug out some Bob Dylan and Neil Young albums which didn't conform in that way and just thought: "Screw that guy." In a way, I'm glad it happened that way,' she admits. 'Before I got signed I was one of those artists who was always moving forward and learning, honing my craft. The 10 years I'd spent in Austin and Houston I hadn't even thought about trying to get a record deal, I was just doing day jobs and playing music.

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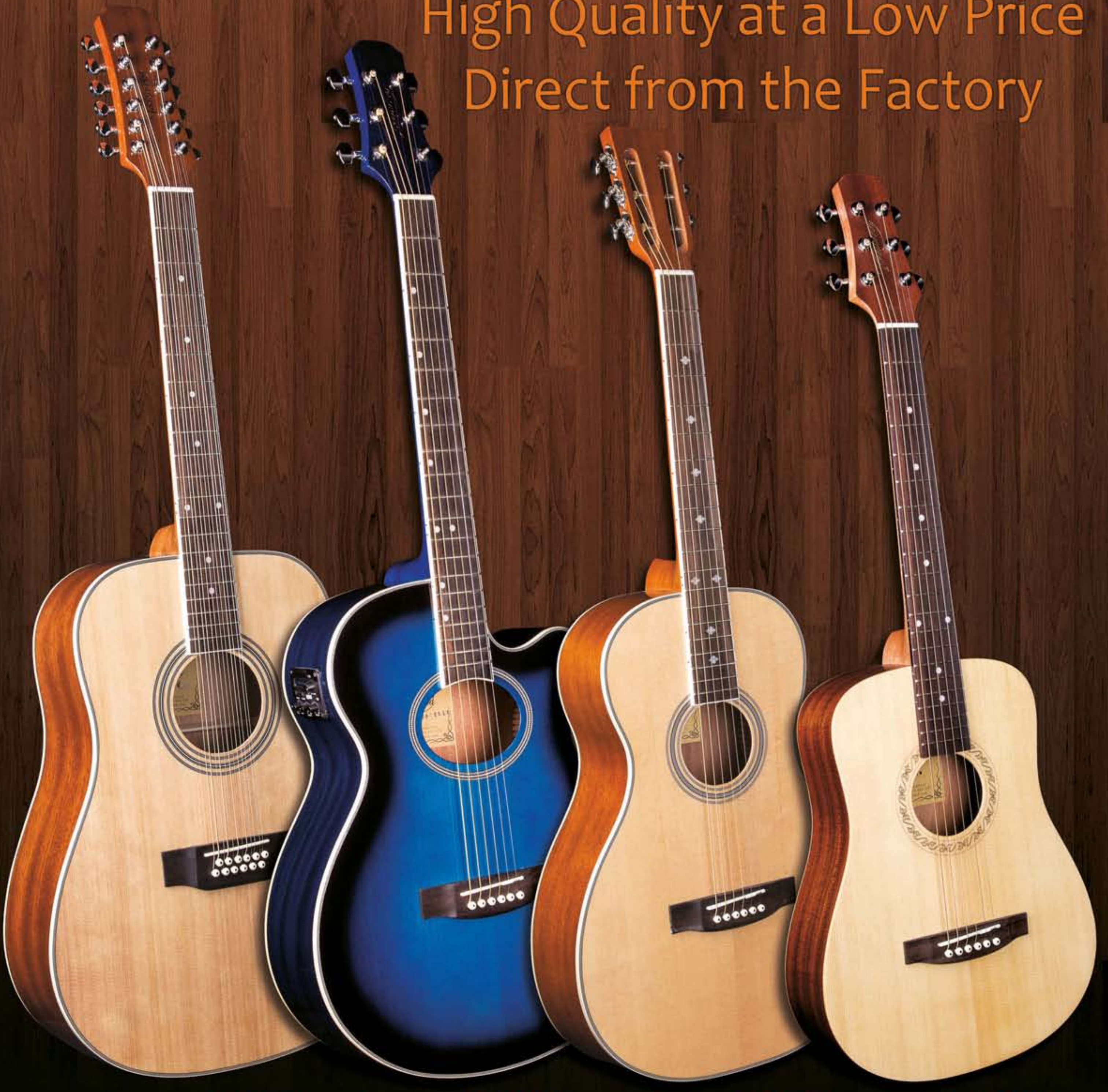

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Somehow I knew it was eventually going to happen for me, but I had to wait for the right time. In honesty, I wasn't really ready artistically or musically; I look at Bob Dylan who was 18 or 19 when he was writing those incredible songs, and know I didn't reach any level until I was in my 30s.'

With Rough Trade promoting her self-titled album, Lucinda Williams' career took an upswing – European tours, songs covered by Mary Chapin Carpenter and Tom Petty, and a duet with Steve Earle. But it wasn't until the release of her Gurf Morlix-produced album *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road* in 1998, that she finally stepped out of the shadows, the album receiving a Grammy Award and being nominated in Rolling Stone's top 500 albums of all time.

'It was incredible to be that age and have that record happen, and now I'm 61 and look what I've just done with the new album,' she laughs.

With guests like Tony Joe White and Jakob Dylan onboard, her band augmented by Bill Frisell, Faces keyboard player Ian McLagan and Elvis Costello's rhythm section, the album just crackles with life. At times veering towards familiar rock and country grooves, the second half sinks into a soul-inflected feel worthy of the finest hours of Muscle Shoals.

You mentioned that you've been listening to Dan Penn and Clarence Carter… 'I've always been inspired by that kind of music,' she enthuses. 'Recently there was a reissue of some of those Fame studio recordings and I've been listening to them a lot while I've been writing. Whatever I've been listening to does influence my songs and I wrote 'Protection' deliberately in that style; most of my songs are ballads and I was really feeling the need to pump things up a little bit. Most of the tracks were recorded with Elvis Costello's rhythm section, and I loved having all those different guys coming in. I still had my guys Butch Norton and David Sutton playing, and we cut enough stuff for three albums – over 30 tracks. And it was great to work with Tony Joe White – he's amazing. The first time I saw him play was in Nashville in the late 90s and he was unbelievably good, I couldn't believe what a great player he was. He was in LA playing when we recorded the album, so we talked him into staying on a couple of days and coming into the studio. He looks and acts just like he does onstage – easygoing, easy to work with. We'd do a couple of takes of a song. I usually like to do three takes or four at the most, but with Tony Joe when I'd say: "Let's do one more," he'd say, "Why? We don't need to do another one." We'd get a couple of takes with him and that would be it – a pretty stubborn guy.'

When it comes down to her songwriting, Lucinda says it's like "dipping in a well". 'Happiness is all relative and it comes and it goes,' she suggests. 'There's stuff you can draw on from your past; you don't have to be suffering in the moment. People think you're writing from the exact moment, but that's not how it happens. I was talking to Tom Petty about it and he said that when he was depressed, the last thing he wanted to do was sit down and write a song.'

Lucinda's favourite songwriting guitar is a 1972 Martin that she bought for $800 in 1980, but she's usually spotted onstage toting a sunburst Gibson. 'It's a remake in the J45 Everly Brothers style. I bash the hell out of them with my belt buckle on the back and my metal finger picks. I'm not a purist and I don't like having something that's too delicate.'

Lucinda Williams' latest record Down Where The Spirit Meets The Bone *is out now.*
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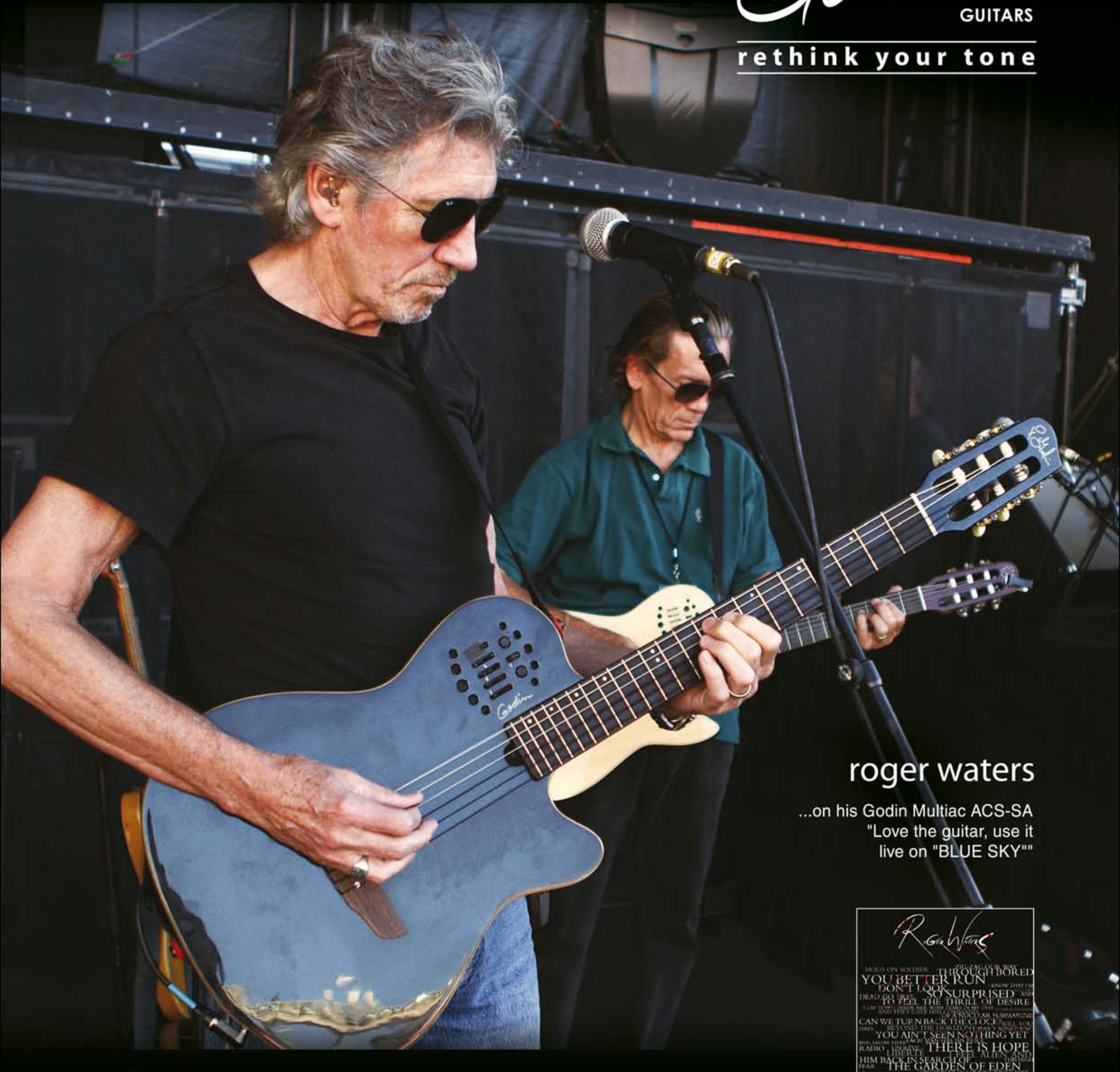

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JACKSON BROWNE

*Jackson Browne talks to Acoustic about his "instant classic" 14th album **Standing In The Breach**, vintage Martin guitars, and the pressure to keep recording music that is still in touch with what matters.*

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES IMAGES: DANNY CLINCH

In his mid-60s, and with 18 million albums sold, Jackson Browne shows no signs of slowing down. He's in the middle of a tour to promote his latest album *Standing In The Breach*, and in conversation during a stop in Barcelona, he thought about the differences between touring as a solo acoustic player, and fronting his band.

'I am really happy to be touring with the band right now,' Browne starts, after giving the matter some thought. 'Right after I finished the record, I went right out on the road and did a series of solo acoustic gigs, maybe about six weeks or so because I wanted to get that feeling out of system, the need to be out on the road and playing to audiences after being in the studio making the record. It takes a while to get a record ready for release. Once the recording was done, I knew there would be a period of checking reference discs and making sure that everything was sorted out for the album to be released properly. I would say that I really prefer band shows, although having said that, my band shows were informed by my acoustic shows. There is a level of intimacy and communication in an acoustic show that is easy to lose in a band show. That's the thing that can get lost, and it's the thing that all great shows have: the communication with the audience. It is easier to lose that if you are on stage with a band and everyone is communicating with everyone else on stage. I have had friends who have told me that they prefer the acoustic shows.'

Accompanying Jackson on the road are long-time band mates Val McCallum (guitar), Mauricio Lewak (Drums), Jeff Young (keyboards) and Bob Glaub (bass), with the addition of acclaimed multi-instrumentalist Greg Leisz (guitar, lap steel, pedal steel). *Standing In The Breach*, Jackson's 14th studio album, is a collection of 10 songs, at turns deeply personal and political, exploring love, hope, and defiance in the face of the advancing uncertainties of modern life.

'This is my ideal band, with some of my favourite players, all of whom appear on the new CD, and whose combined gifts provide the musical foundation and emotional underpinnings of my new songs,' says Jackson. 'The interplay between Val McCallum and Greg Leisz on this album – the effortlessness of their chemistry is a gift really, that just dropped into my lap. I feel fortunate to have them out on the road for this tour.'

As one of the most notable acoustic guitar playing singer-songwriters alive, the type and model of guitar Jackson uses is obviously of great interest not just to him, but to us. 'I have two 00-17 Martins from the 1950s. I bought the first one as a gift for someone I had spent a day playing with, and in the end I had to go and get him something else. Then I decided I wanted a second one because the first was in a certain tuning that I liked to keep it in because it gave it a really unusual and powerful sound for a small guitar with a mahogany top. In

this low tuning, it gave out such a deep and powerful growling tone. This is pretty much my go-to guitar; it's all over my new album. It is a great guitar.'

'I had been playing Gibson LG-2s; I had a couple of them and I still have them and I still like them, but this Martin really captured my imagination. The Gibson LG-2s were made in the 1940s, they have these big fat baseball necks on them, and the Martin has a smaller neck; it feels a little more delicate. It has a feel that is a little closer to that of an electric guitar, and it has a small body. I bought the first one – that was supposed to be a gift – in a guitar shop in Hollywood, and the second one I got in a guitar shop in New York. I had the feeling that it had some songs in it. I found myself playing it, and thinking that I needed to keep playing it the way it sounded. Turns out it did have songs in it, and it gave them to me,' Browne enthuses.

'I also have another Martin, which was given to me. It's the Martin F55, which was an electric model that they made in the 1960s, around 1961 or 1962. I think the Gretsch Country Gentleman inspired it. It has the old DeArmond singlecoil pickups in it; it's an incredible sounding guitar, and it has the same style and size of neck as the Martin 00-17. It sounds like a semi-acoustic, and it has a lot of the same sound properties as an acoustic guitar, although it is an electric. This was given to me by a friend for my last birthday, he had bought it about 20 years ago with the intention of learning guitar, and he eventually realised that he wasn't going to be a guitar player, so he stuck it away in his closet. He was actually told by another friend of ours that it wasn't any good. This other guy said that it needed a lot of work, and it was never going to be any good, but this guy just didn't know, he just had a very different take on what makes a good guitar. The guitar turned out to be amazing.'

'I have a lot of different guitars that I write with, and I also write on piano. I tend to write with whatever is around that feels right at the time. I like the spontaneity and unpredictability that a guitar will have in it when I pick it up – I never know what I am looking for, it could be anything. You think a guitar might give you the sound you think you are looking for, but in the end you take what the guitar is giving you; it will often inspire a certain type of music, or a certain type of playing. If you are looking for something specific, you may know which guitar to go to and try and find it, but rarely do I know what I am looking for.'

'The song 'Which Side Are You On' is one of my favourites from *Standing In The Breach*,' Jackson says. 'I liked it a lot when I was working on it and it became a great song when I was playing it. My instinct, which was against my better judgement, was to not go very long with it, and not to write as many verses as I wrote. I was erring on the side of discretion when it came to talking about political issues, maybe people don't always have the capacity to absorb this kind of thing. But, in the end, I decided there was no way around it, I was going to have to just spit it out and say what I was thinking – about being on one side or the other. Structurally, there was no way around it, I realised it was going to have to have three verses, but I didn't really want to have to bring the chorus around for a third time, so I really had to work and edit to get it to fit. It has become a really fun song to play live and I guess the sheer power of the way it goes over on stage means that the political content can get through as well.'

We ask Jackson how it feels as fans tell him songs he has written echoes sentiments with their lives. 'I do get that and even I know how it feels, says Jackson. 'I know writers that have done that for me. I know the effect that some musicians' voices can have on me, just the sound of their voices, just their breath in the air can move me, and a song can feel like a companion I would not want to be without. Sometimes that can happen; you hear a song or a collection of songs that really hits the spot and it's beyond being impressed – it is being reached. It is about being connected to something and it's very special. Right now, the new Lucinda Williams album is having that effect on me. It's one of the greatest guitar records you are going to hear, and it is something completely different if you have the lyrics with you and read them as the song is playing. It's not always easy to understand what she is singing because of her accent and the incredible gift of her phrasing; she has such a tactile way of singing. Who else? Patti Griffin records slay me, Shawn Colvin too. Dawes is one of the great songwriting bands, and I love their material as well. They are really gifted musicians, and a couple of them are on my new album playing bass and drums.'

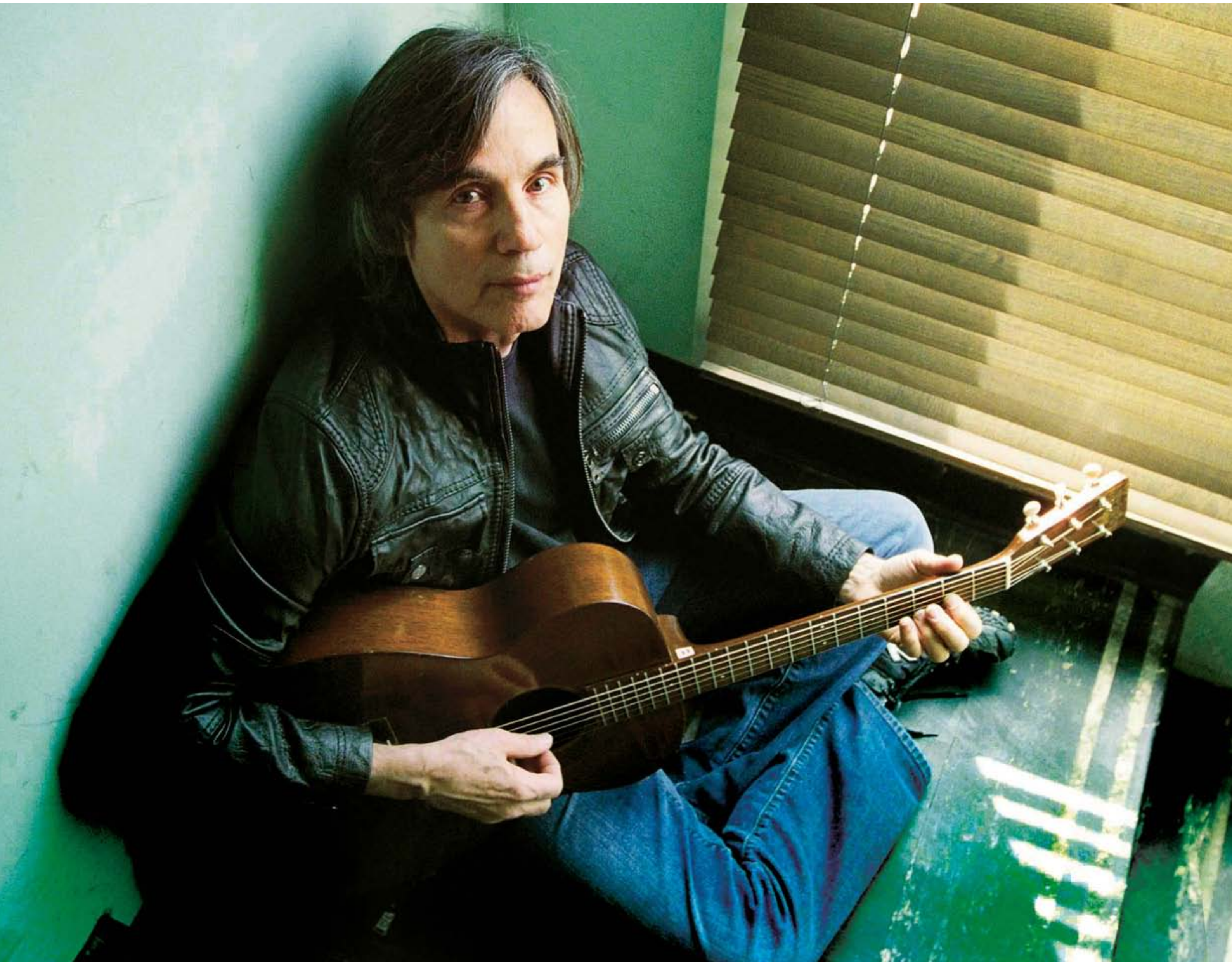
> *"The question is whether what you are doing is still in touch with what matters. It's not about how often you write, or how much – it's about what you write."*

As a writer of some of the most moving songs committed to record, how does Jackson Browne tap into that rich emotional well that informs his music? 'I think there is an aspect of acting when you are performing on stage. I could, for the sake of discussion, adopt a persona to write a song. If someone asked me to write a song from the point of view of a villainous character, then I could do that. I would say that it's not always me that I am singing about in my songs, but it is always something I have experienced directly – that has to be there to make it work. Even if you write from the point of view of someone else, you still write from your own experiences.'

'I think songwriters have an inbuilt instinct for the truth of a word or a phrase, a way of turning a phrase upside down and making it mean something new and different. It's the same as the advertising industry; they take a word or a phrase that everyone knows well, but they change it a subtle way so that it catches the ear. I have something to say when I am writing, but I don't know what it is, I am listening to myself when I am writing. The filter is, can you sing it, and does it work that way? I have written songs on airplanes when there is no opportunity to play a melody to it, or to sing out a melody idea. So when you get to somewhere where you can sing it, you realise that it doesn't work. The line may be true, but you can't sing it, it just doesn't work. That's what I love about the new Lucinda Williams album – she can really play with the way a word sounds.'

With a new album and a new tour under way, it's clear that Jackson Browne still has the desire to go on writing and recording new music, and taking it around the world to perform live. Does he feel that his best work is still ahead

Gallegos



of him? 'That's certainly a hope. I think, at this stage, I will settle for not repeating myself, or at least to be aiming for something that will be a worthy addition to the songs I have already written. There is always the question about how long you will be able to do this. The inner question is whether what you are doing is still in touch with what matters. When you are young, you are wondering if this is good enough for anyone to listen to it, but when you are old, you wonder if it's good enough to add to your body of work. You have to pay attention to that.'

'When you have a career, and people are expecting a record from you, it would be easy to make a record because there is some sort of deadline, or make a record because you can sell it. But you do see musicians who will wait and be sure that they have the songs that they want on their record. There are some artists that write a lot, and they are vigilant. For me it's not such a problem, because I only finish the songs that I really care about. There are artists who write songs and never use them, and they just write another record altogether. Bruce Springsteen played me a collection of songs that he wrote for his latest album, and then he just decided to write something else entirely and started again – and the new collection of songs came together in one go. That speaks to me of a musician who is using proper vigilance, and taking proper care, and not simply putting songs out because they can. If you are Bruce Springsteen and you have the whole world clamouring for your next record, there must be pressure to give in to that temptation and simply put stuff out there. On the other hand, you don't want to be so precious about it in that nothing ever gets done; I imagine that's something of a balancing act.'

'I'm not a prolific writer. I once asked Warren Zevon what his work practices are, and he told me that he really only had one rule about songwriting: "Don't write it if you don't feel it." That is good advice. I have asked a number of writers about how they get their material, and it's just not possible to really know how people get the stuff that they get as it is different for everyone. I think the general rule is to try and organise yourself so that that you are visited by inspiration as often as possible. It's not about how often you write, or how much – it's about what you write. I am always trying, and always looking.'

Jackson Browne's* Standing In The Breach *is out now.
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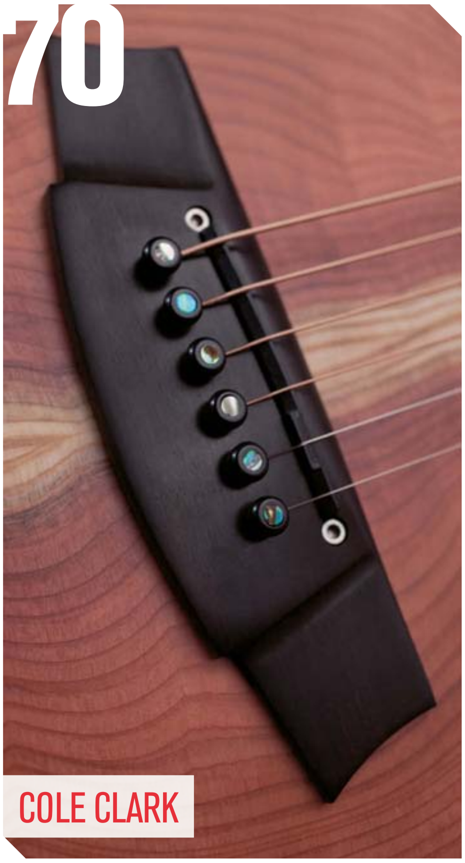
GEAR REVIEWS

60 LOWDEN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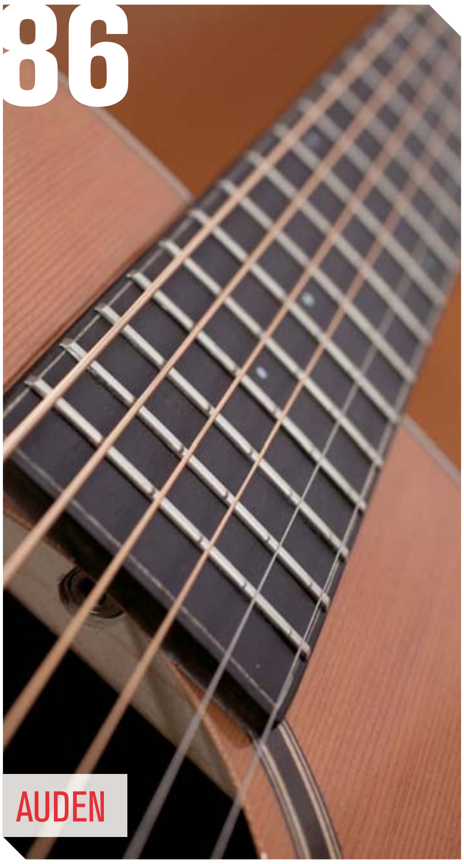
86 AUDEN

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THE WEE LOWDEN

David Mead takes a look at an exciting addition to the formidable Lowden acoustic guitar range in the form of the original Wee model and the 40th anniversary upgrade...

APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY TO HEAR THESE IN ACTION

There have been plans to make a small-bodied Lowden guitar for some time. But whereas other manufacturers have released reduced size versions of their guitars and aimed them squarely at the sub £500 travel guitar market, George Lowden decided that his "Mini Me" model was going to fit uncompromisingly into his range of high quality instruments. He also decided that whereas the body dimensions might be small, the guitar's voice would be anything but: "The final design focused on voicing the bracing and soundbox geometry so that the voice was even and smooth, without the boxiness sometimes overly evident in small guitars."

The Wee Lowden is available in three versions at present: the standard WL-25, a more expensive WL-35 with a redwood top and the flagship of the range, the 40th Anniversary model, which has specially selected woods and the benefit of a lot of hands-on from George himself during the construction of each instrument.

The beginning of the Wee Lowden story took place 20 months ago when Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody contacted the company and asked if they could make a small-bodied guitar as a present for Ed Sheeran. Having had the idea of making something in that vein to add to the range for a while anyway, the request

kick-started the process that has led to the release of the guitars you see pictured here. But it wasn't just a question of shrinking an established model in the range; on the contrary, it was a painstaking process which saw George Lowden lock himself away at a retreat on the Irish coast for four days while he drew designs for the body shape and pondered over the bracing, woods, bridge position and many of the other variables available to him before building the first prototypes. The full story of the development of the Wee Lowden is covered in our interview with George a little later on, but for now, let's take a look at these two titans in detail...

The WL-25 has a cedar top – the standard top material for the Lowden range

Another Lowden standard is the two rosewood strips on the neck's rear

WEE LOWDEN
WL-25

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Lowden
Model: Original Wee Lowden
Retail Price: £2775
Body Size: See text
Made In: Northern Ireland
Top: Cedar
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Five-piece mahogany/rosewood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 21
Tuners: Schaller M6
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 610mm
Left Handers: No extra charge
Strings Fitted: Elixir .012 - .053
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: It may be small, but it's every inch a Lowden!
Cons: Nothing to declare…
Overall: A pint-sized powerhouse with some great tonal attributes

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★½
Sound Quality	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Lowden Guitars
www.lowdenguitars.com

WEE LOWDEN WL-25

After the initial unboxing of this guitar – my first look at a Wee Lowden – I put it on a stand in front of me and spent a while trying to work out which of his company's established body sizes George had based this model upon. A sort of a Honey-I-Shrank-The-S-Series, perhaps? In the end I decided that things must have been taken right back to the drawing board stage, because this really does look like something rather new and special.

BUILD QUALITY

Obviously words alone aren't adequate enough to convey exactly how wee this Lowden is and so forgive me if I begin my look at this model with some vital statistics. The slender upper bout here measures in at 242mm, with the lower totalling 335mm and a waist of 202mm. Body depth is just 100mm and so you can see straight away that we are talking about a compact little instrument indeed. This model's official title is the WL-25 which is, as I have already mentioned, one of three Wee Lowdens in the current range. As such, it has a cedar top, the standard soundboard material throughout the Lowden range. As we will be considering its 40th Anniversary stablemate in just a minute, it's worth taking time out to consider the acknowledged properties of this particular tonewood. Cedar is nearly always considered as being a warmer alternative to the standard spruce, being softer and less dense. It also has a tendency to offer a slightly flatter dynamic range; driven hard, a cedar top displays a kind of natural compression, but softer picking will result in quieter tones becoming more prominent.

Fingerstylists with a gentler touch often opt for cedar and when you think that this is the top wood favoured almost exclusively by builders of classical guitars, you can begin to see its place in the general scheme of things.

So, it's western red cedar for the top of the Wee Lowden with a fine, tight grain pattern that has been neatly bound around the top and back edges with figured mahogany combined with a composite of sycamore, walnut and rosewood for the purfling. The rosette comprises rings of rosewood, sycamore and mahogany and the general look of the top is that of seriously classy understatement. There's an almost invisible clear plastic scratch plate under the soundhole, but you'd miss it if you didn't know it was there.

The back and sides are Indian rosewood, neatly bookmatched to

The upgraded Wee has a Redwood top – one of George's favourite woods

For the anniversary models, George personally selects the woods to be used

the rear with no centre strip. It's rosewood again for the heel-cap which sits at the base of the guitar's five-piece composite mahogany and rosewood neck. In effect, this means three strips of mahogany with two strips of rosewood that fall gracefully to the back of the heel. This is another standard on Lowden guitars and I must admit I've always liked it.

Up at the top of the neck, the headstock is lined with Schaller M6 gold coloured tuners with ebony buttons which look every bit as swish as they sound. There's a rosewood veneer to the front of the headstock, with the Lowden logo in pearl at the top. Beneath this, the fretboard is bound ebony with no position markers and a palm-friendly shallow C profile. Both nut and saddle are bone, the latter sitting atop a rosewood bridge.

SOUND QUALITY

When this guitar was still at the design stage, George Lowden was determined that despite its diminutive body size, it shouldn't actually sound like a small guitar. So an awful lot of attention was paid to the soundbox and bracing in order to get as much power and tone out of it as possible. And you know what? I think they've succeeded admirably because the Wee Lowden sounds anything but "wee". There's a really surprising amount of volume, to begin with; you wouldn't mistake it for a jumbo, but I'm willing to bet that not many players would pick it out as being a small body guitar in a blindfold test. You might think that you'd lose quite a lot of bass response, but this simply isn't the case, either. It's in very good supply and sits in almost perfect proportion to the trebles, which themselves are crisp with the sort of mellow edge that comes hand in hand with a cedar top.

The reduced scale length – just 610mm – means that you can safely upgrade your string gauge to suit with little significant increase in string tension. Personally, I might venture up to .013s to bring out a bit more of a "snap" to the sound when drop tuned, but this is a highly subjective area and it really is fine as it stands.

40TH ANNIVERSARY WEE LOWDEN

As I mentioned in the intro to these reviews, there is another model that fits in between the two we have in for appraisal. The WL-35 is priced at £3,665 and features a redwood top, as opposed to the WL-25's cedar. The 40th Anniversary model is based on the WL-35, but with the added bonus of the woods being personally selected by George himself, who also oversees the construction of each model.

40th ANNIVERSARY WEE LOWDEN

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Lowden
Model: 40th Anniversary Wee Lowden
Retail Price: £4550
Body Size: See text
Made In: Northern Ireland
Top: Redwood
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Five-piece mahogany/rosewood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 21
Tuners: Gotoh 510
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 610mm
Left Handers: No extra charge
Strings Fitted: Elixir .012 - .053
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Amazing depth and projection with some serious tone
Cons: The premium price tag may put a few potential purchasers off
Overall: A collectable, deluxe, small-bodied instrument with the voice of a giant!

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★☆

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Lowden Guitars
www.lowdenguitars.com

BUILD QUALITY

In the review of the WL-25 we considered briefly the sonic properties of cedar and so it's only right that I now contrast that with a look at those of redwood, the top timber on the model before me. As we know, the redwood, or Sequoia, is the tallest tree that grows anywhere in the world. Its straight grain and high resistance to rot is good news for luthiers, but its use as a tonewood has been restricted up until recently. However, it is now seen as an alternative to the more readily available cedar and shares some of its sonic attributes. Redwood is said by many to be slightly brighter in the trebles and upper midrange than cedar and with greater projection, too. It is also favourably compared with Sitka spruce in its slightly compressed response when subjected to vigorous strumming. It is rapidly becoming a favourite among fingerstylists for its crisp, complex overtones and dashing good looks.

The grain to the redwood top on this Wee Lowden is less uniform than on the WL-25 and quite a bit darker in hue, too. Strangely enough, I wouldn't say that it was more red in colour; on the contrary there seems to be more black or dark brown mixed into the spectrum. It's still a very handsome looking piece of wood, though, and has a suitably regal charm to it, with a rosette that has been upgraded to abalone, instead of the rosewood, sycamore and mahogany composite we saw a moment ago. The same clear plastic pick guard is situated underneath the guitar's soundhole and I must say that I like its transparency and the way that it doesn't interfere at all with the overall aesthetic of the instrument's top.

It's Indian rosewood once again for the back and sides, but bear in mind that the wood on the 40th Anniversary models has all been specially chosen by George Lowden himself, with an eye to marrying up the very best components in order to produce an optimum tonal response. There's a similar mahogany binding around the edges of this guitar, but this time it extends to a centre strip down the back of the instrument. There's the same rosewood heel cap, too, but with the addition of the designation "40th" set in pearl. The neck is another five piece mahogany and rosewood mix in the same sort of style as on the WL-25, but this time the rear of the headstock has an overlay of ebony both front and back, the latter having the "40th Anniversary" logo emblazoned in pearl.

It's simple: the Wees are truly stunning – expect nothing short of excellence

Tuners are Gotoh 510 with ebony buttons this time around and the neck has been bound using a combination of ebony and maple.

At the other end of the string length there's a rosewood bridge with the strings loaded from the back, and the customary split string saddle, a hallmark of all the instruments in the Lowden range.

Generally speaking, when you compare the two models side by side they are extremely similar, but the 40th Anniversary has a discernible air of upgraded quality to it.

The redwood top offers greater overall projection than cedar soundboard

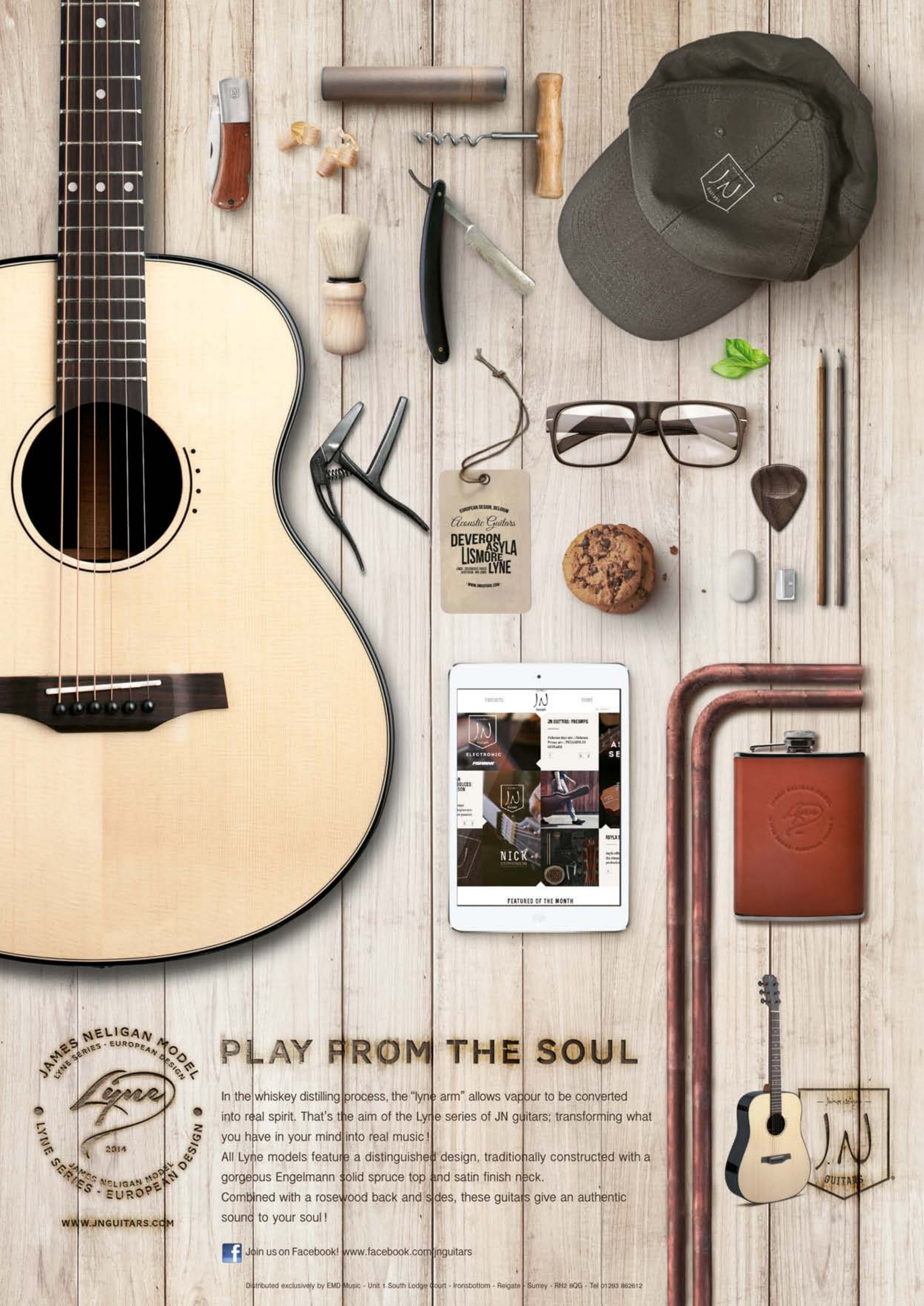
SOUND QUALITY

I'll say straight away that I was expecting these two instruments to sound very similar to one another with maybe just a few refinements to this model, but when I picked it up to play it, I was in for a surprise. To begin with, the bass response seems to have at once a darker tonal quality to it and quite a lot of added projection at the same time. There's certainly some added clarity and separation on offer when the two are played one after the other and this is a feature that extends to the upper ranges, too. Where the trebles on the WL-25 were excellent, here there's an added roundness in texture. More majestic and somehow bigger-sounding, too. I was surprised by how much volume you could get from a small body with the WL-25, but here there seems to be an extra 15 per cent on top. I would imagine that if you installed a decent pickup on either of these guitars, you would have a very able instrument to use live – I for one would love to hear one through a good sound system as I think the result would be amazing.

From a physical perspective, both are comfortable to play, but if I was shopping with my ears, then the 40th Anniversary definitely has an edge to it that would help me make the decision of which to buy.

CONCLUSION

With this sort of build quality and attention to detail where the sound is concerned, these two Wee Lowdens really hit the spot. True to say that neither is cheap – in fact the 40th Anniversary comes in at £4.5k – but Lowden users know to expect nothing short of excellence from the brand and so I doubt whether anyone will be disappointed after spending some time with one. It might be tempting to prejudge the Wee Lowden on its size, thinking that it's nothing more than a folly, but take my word for it, far from being just a novelty act, these are serious instruments and worthy additions to the Lowden stable.



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WEE ARE FAMILY

David Mead speaks with George Lowden about the development and production of the newest addition to his guitar range.

After spending a few days with the two Wee Lowdens featured in our review, I was genuinely amazed at how their voices contradict their physical appearance. They may look small, but when you hear them there's no mistaking their place among a range renowned for its extremely high build quality and tonal firepower. Naturally, we're witnessing the end result of quite a long process and so my first question to George was how long the Wee Lowdens have been on the company's drawing board.

'About 20 months; it took me a year to get to the point where we had the prototypes made and then it was several months after that before we were able to produce them in the workshops. When you've got an adjustment to an existing model it takes a lot less time than that, but if you've got a completely new model then there are a lot of other implications. It takes me a lot of time to think through the design because you've got different scale lengths, you've got body sizes and you have to think about the type of tone that you want to achieve. Whether you achieve it or not is another question, but there are an awful lot of things that have to be considered and judgement calls made. Then the hope is that you've made enough good choices that the prototype does what you hoped it would do. I suppose most of the time the way it works with a new model is that, if I'm doing well, I'll get 80 to 90 per cent of what I'm looking for and then we fine tune things; adjust the voicing slightly or whatever afterwards. So that's what happened in this case. Out of the first two prototypes I made, one was a present that was requested of me for Ed Sheeran; it was actually Gary Lightbody from Snow Patrol who contacted me and asked if I would make a guitar for Ed. So I immediately started to think about what would be appropriate for him and that was kind of the catalyst to come up with this design. I was very pleased that Ed loves it and is playing it on stage for two or three songs as well, which is great,' George starts.

When I reviewed the guitars, it struck me that the Wee Lowden isn't just a regular model that you've shrunk down in size, it really is something totally new in the range, right?

It is. There are a lot of choices that you have to make and I went up to the north coast of Northern Ireland, near Bushmills, in the autumn of 2013 and spent about four days there on my own, drawing it up and thinking about the various options in terms of scale length, proportions, all of that. I was really trying to make sure that when it was finished it didn't sound boxy, but sounded like a real acoustic guitar that responded properly. The danger with small guitars is that they can sound hard and boxy and I was trying everything I could to avoid that. So I spent time thinking through things and making choices and then remaking them, thinking that if I chose that string length it might just make the guitar a little bit too brash. So I'd lengthen it up a little and see where that put the soundhole and the bridge and then looked at how that related to the bracing and all of that. So many things are interrelated, it's not a straightforward thing when you design a new guitar like that. It's not a shrunk small body, I think it's a proper guitar in its own right.

What was the basis for you choosing a cedar/Indian rosewood combination on the WL-25?

When you're talking about a small guitar, cedar can almost be too crisp. It can be lacking in body, sometimes. But when you've got cedar on a big soundbox, like our O or F models, it's big enough to allow the cedar to have its full degree of warmth. But when you have a small soundbox it could end up sounding too thin. So that's the reason why I put it with Indian rosewood, because I wanted it to put a little more lower middle into the sound and rosewood is good for that, especially Indian rosewood. Some of the others like Honduras or Brazilian rosewood will add clarity and a little bit of volume, but maybe not quite as much warmth. So that's why I made that choice for what you might call the standard model.

As for the WL-35 40th Anniversary, would I be right in thinking that redwood is high among your favourite woods for a soundboard?

Redwood is one of my favourite topwoods, full stop. It's difficult to get high quality redwood, but when you do, as a tonewood

it's fantastic. It has warmth and sustain, but in the best grades of it, it has clarity as well. So if I'm looking for a really stiff redwood top where there are a lot of medullary rays showing up and it's nice and light in weight, you get the crispness that you expect, but you also get that warmth and sustain that you're looking for. Sinker redwood is arguably even better. Not everyone likes the variations in colour that you get – the dark lines and all that – but that's the way sinker is and I love it.

What are the main advantages to redwood as a top material over cedar?
I think the main advantage is a little extra body and warmth and also a little bit of extra sustain. So you get a little extra of everything except that cedar responds quicker, so it's a slightly easier response with cedar in that you can play the guitar gently and it will respond very easily. With redwood you have the possibility of digging in a bit more; there are hardly any downsides that I can think of.

During the time that I spent with our two review models, I was amazed at the difference between the redwood and cedar versions. I was expecting them to be in the same kind of area, sonically speaking, but the redwood version had a sound all its own.
If you look at the top of that guitar, you'll probably find that there are quite pronounced medullary rays on the soundboard – at least, there should be. It'll probably be a sinker redwood top, as well, and all of that helps with the separation that you're talking about and also the fullness of the tone. But you have to remember that it's a 40th Anniversary model and so I personally take quite a bit of interest in each of those. I do the final checking of the voicing and the choice of the main woods and so on.

The models I've played are not only new guitars in the range, they are also relatively fresh from the workbench and so it will be interesting to hear how they both develop over the years.
When a guitar is new it takes some time for it to come out. Some guitars at the beginning will sound a little bright and lacking in warmth and body, but once you give those guitars a little bit of time they begin to warm up and have more body. I've just had a guitar come in here from 1974 – my number six, would you believe – and another one which is number 18. They both came in today for a little bit of work and the sound of number 18, from 1975, is just amazing. And only time can do that, you know? So it is a little bit difficult to judge sound when the guitars are new; sometimes you have to beat the life out of them for about half an hour and then listen to them. There was a guy in New York, a well-known guitar maker, who had a shop there selling mostly classical guitars that he'd made. He had a system there which not everybody knew about; when someone came in looking for one of his guitars, he would send one of the apprentices downstairs, telling him to go and find such-and-such a guitar and, unknown to the customer, this guy would go downstairs, find the guitar very quickly and beat the life out of it for about ten or 15 minutes and then bring it back up. But that's true; when a guitar's new you have to do that. I'm not suggesting that you put a hole in it or anything, but give it a good whacking!

Snow Patrol's lead guitarist Nathan Connolly (second from the left), and frontman and guitarist Gary Lightbody (centre), both own Wee Lowdens

IF I PLAY HERE

Snow Patrol's Nathan Connolly talks about his Wee Lowden WL-25

Multi-platinum Irish/Scottish five-piece Snow Patrol comprises Gary Lightbody (vocals, guitar), Nathan Connolly (guitar), Jonny Quinn (drums), Johnny McDaid (piano, guitar, backing vocals), and Paul Wilson (bass). The band found international acclaim with 2003's *Final Straw* producing the hit single 'Run'. In 2006 they released *Eyes Open* which propelled them to international superstars and festival headliners thanks to 'Chasing Cars'. The band released their latest – and sixth in total – studio album *Fallen Empires* in 2011. Snow Patrol has sold more than 12 million albums to date.

NATHAN CONNOLLY & HIS WL-25

"In the last year and a half I started playing smaller bodied acoustics and fell in love with them, mainly because of their size; I liked the freedom I felt they allowed me on stage. So I was thrilled to hear that Lowden were introducing the Wee model. I have a WL-25, Indian Rosewood back and sides and Cedar top and the LR Baggs Anthem pick up and it is a beautiful thing. I instantly felt comfortable with it, settling into it blissfully. I got to try it out for the first time live when I guested with Ed Sheeran over a few nights in Belfast and London. It was perfect. Aside from the obvious – the standard you associate with a Lowden – I love the quality, depth in tone and projection from such a small-bodied guitar both acoustically and from the pickup. Ed and I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon at the factory with George and the amazing family he has there. It reignited something in me: a greater appreciation for my instrument."

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COLE CLARK ANGEL 3EC

An Angel from the Antipodes descends upon unsuspecting reviewer **David Mead**

I reviewed the Cole Clark Angel 2 in these pages around 18 months ago and remember being impressed by the freshness of the Melbourne-based company's approach toward building. Featuring woods indigenous to Australia and a set of innovative electronics that suits a wide variety of styles, I was also bowled over by the sheer array of tones on offer. This model is so new it's not even featured on the Cole Clark website as yet. So are we in for another angelic treat?

BUILD QUALITY

This guitar produced a sort of Marmite moment in the magazine's offices with opinion split down the middle with regards to its looks. Personally, I think it's striking and distinctive with a top that would certainly be a talking point at any gathering of acoustic players.

The wood in question is Californian redwood, and if you're thinking that this doesn't quite qualify as a wood indigenous to Oz, then listen up, because it has a story to tell. Back in the late 1850s a botanist by the name of Baron von Mueller was commissioned to provide plants for the Ballarat Botanical Gardens and among them were some Californian Redwood trees. Cole Clark has obtained some of the wood which has fallen in storms over the years and used it in instruments like this one. You have to admit that the top wood here really is distinctive with a crazed, wide grain patterning as well as a spear-shaped paler centre section. The edge binding has abalone inserts at the waist and this is reflected in the rosette as well as the position markers down the neck.

Sneaking a look inside, the bracing to the rear of the soundhole is latticed, which is unusual and further evidence of Cole Clark's highly individual build style. It will be interesting to see if this contributes to the sound a bit later on. Back and sides are Indian rosewood, straight grained and dark in hue, with no centre strip.

Cole Clark uses a Spanish Heel neck joint, considered by many to be the most highly developed of all methods of neck construction. Basically, the neck and headblock are carved from a single piece of wood and the body is built around it so that it forms the heart of the guitar. It is thought that this method improves sound transmission and is generally lighter than the other favoured methods such as mortise and tenon or dovetail joints.

The neck itself is made from Queensland Maple Silkwood which has a very pale orange colour to it and is certainly a lot more tanned than the standard maple you might find in a Fender guitar neck, for instance. It feels quite chunky in the hand – but not unpleasantly so – with a broad D profile.

The neck is arrow jointed to a headstock made from Tasmanian Blackwood which, despite its name, isn't really black (as African Blackwood is) but dark brown.

The front of the headstock is a scroll of Queensland Maple with the company name emblazoned in black thereon. Tuners are Grover Imperials, with their very distinctive art deco style buttons which I must admit to not liking too much personally. I'd prefer the more standard kidney bean style and that's nothing to do with an artistic preference, it's down to feel. Imperials have always felt a little awkward to manoeuvre, to me.

The Angels's fingerboard is ebony with the broad abalone markers I referred to earlier and body furnishings are completed with black Tusq nut and saddle, the latter sitting on an attractive ebony bridge.

SOUND QUALITY

I have to say that the sound of this guitar took me somewhat by surprise. It's dark and woody, with the sort of rich overtones that would suit Celtic styles well. In fact, I immediately dropped the tuning to DADGAD when I first heard it and it really suits this tuning admirably.

COLE CLARK ANGEL 3EC

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Cole Clark
Model: Angel 3EC RDRW
Retail Price: £3,739
Body Size: Grand Auditorium
Made In: Australia
Top: Californian Redwood
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Queensland maple silkwood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Grover
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Cole Clark 3-Way
Strings Fitted: Elixir .012 - .053
Gig Bag/Case Included: Cole Clark hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Distinctive looks and a good array of useful sounds
Cons: The tuner buttons and those naked bridge screws
Overall: A guitar that's a real looker with some truly unique features, good woods and great sounds

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality ★★★★½
Sound Quality ★★★★½
Value for Money ★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Zed Music Café
www.thezedmusiccafe.com
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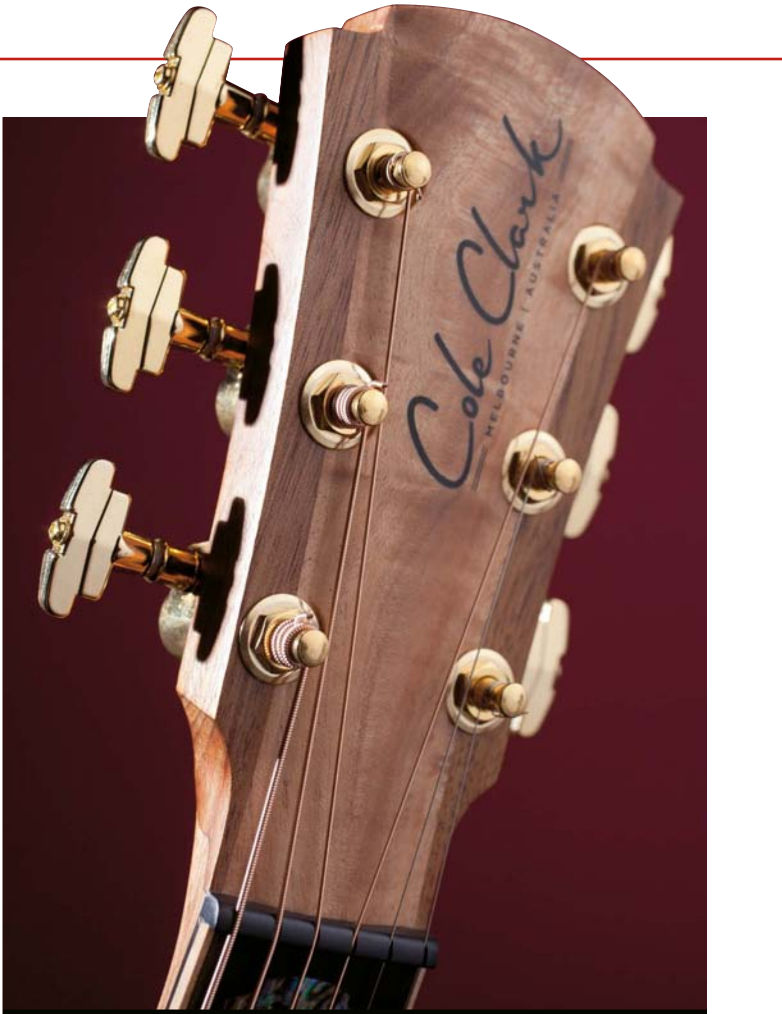


Sound-wise, the Cole Clark is dark, rich, and would suit Celtic styles well

The redwood gives a slightly brighter response than cedar, but it's also somehow more complex, at the same time.

Bass presence is good without being too boomy and the trebles ring with a lot of clarity and separation. The rosewood brings an airiness to the overall sound, too, adding an extra layer of reverb-like resonance to the general timbre and possibly some extra sustain, too. If I heard this guitar from across a room, I think I would possibly be convinced that it was a bigger body size than grand auditorium. It has a jumbo's depth to it, somehow, but in a good way, if you see what I mean.

We met the Cole Clark pickup system on the Angel 2 I looked at last year. Basically it comprises three elements: a piezo under saddle, a sensor under the soundboard and an internal microphone. The controls allow you to blend all three, the clever bit is that they have voiced the internal mic so that it picks up high frequencies and ignores the feedback-laden midrange entirely. This means that, in theory at least, you have the best of all worlds available to you and whatever style you find yourself playing should be ably complemented.

One thing I found a little strange is that the two screws set in the bridge either side of the saddle look like they might provide adjustment for string height, but this isn't the case. Cole Clark go to great lengths to point out that these are to keep the tension on the piezo and are not to be fiddled with under any circumstances. It strikes me that perhaps they would be better blanked off somehow using plastic plugs so that idle and uninformed hands are not tempted to meddle.

Through an amp all the dark woodiness is preserved, the preamp controls allowing you access to all three sound sources, plus EQ sliders for treble, midrange and bass. As such, the sonic world is pretty much your oyster; the centre master volume control is self-explanatory, whereas the left hand rotary affects the blend between the bridge and the soundboard sensor and the third dials the mic in and out. If it sounds complicated, it really isn't and once I'd orientated myself I was able to find a sound I liked almost instantaneously. It's a clever, all encompassing system and I like it a lot.

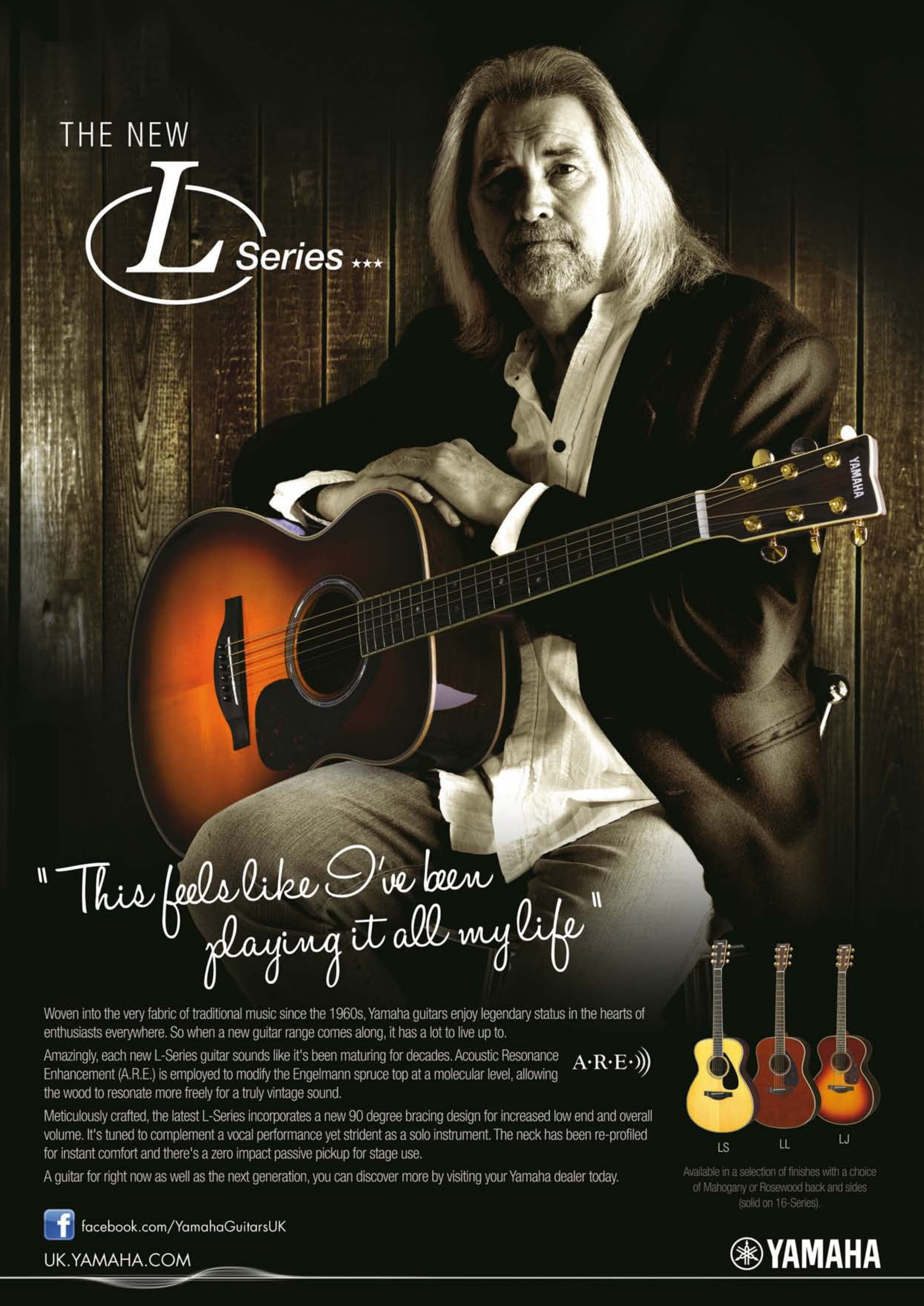
From an aesthetic point of view, you love it or loathe it – we, however, love it

CONCLUSION

From a purely aesthetic point of view, I guess that you're either going to love this guitar or loathe it. As I've said, I quite like it; it's distinctive and different and while I'm not exactly a fan of abalone-laden instruments in general, I think this one errs to the side of good taste. I'd be quite happy to take it along to a gig, no problem.

Sound-wise, it has a lot to say for itself. Acoustically, it will quite possibly find favour among the Celtic music enthusiasts and when you power up the clever on board electronics, virtually anything becomes possible. The modern tappers and slappers will find the sensor and mic combo fun to work with, but the melodists will be happy with the amount of control they have available at the turn of a dial. This is a worthy addition to the range.

David Mead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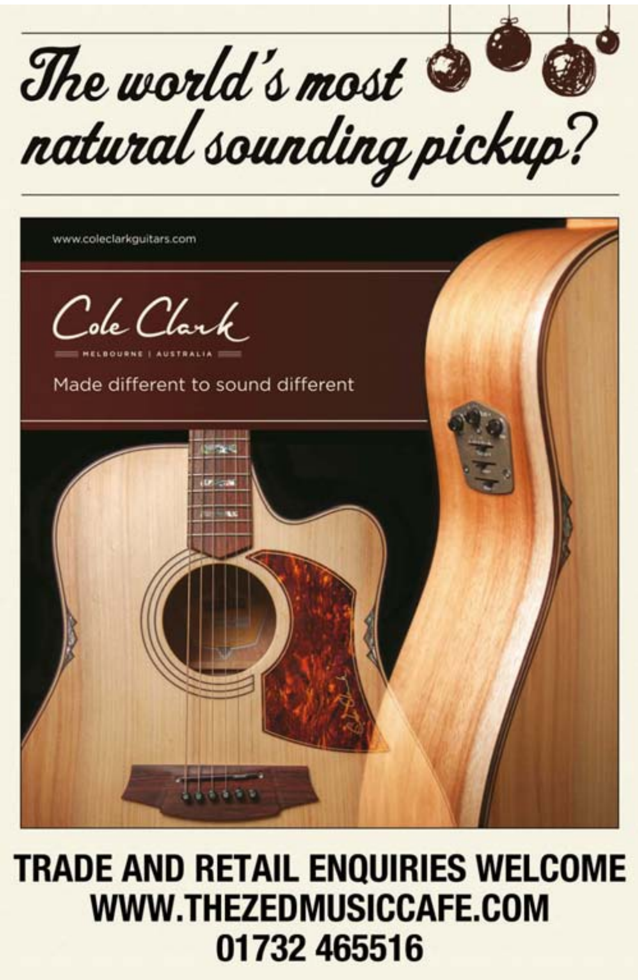
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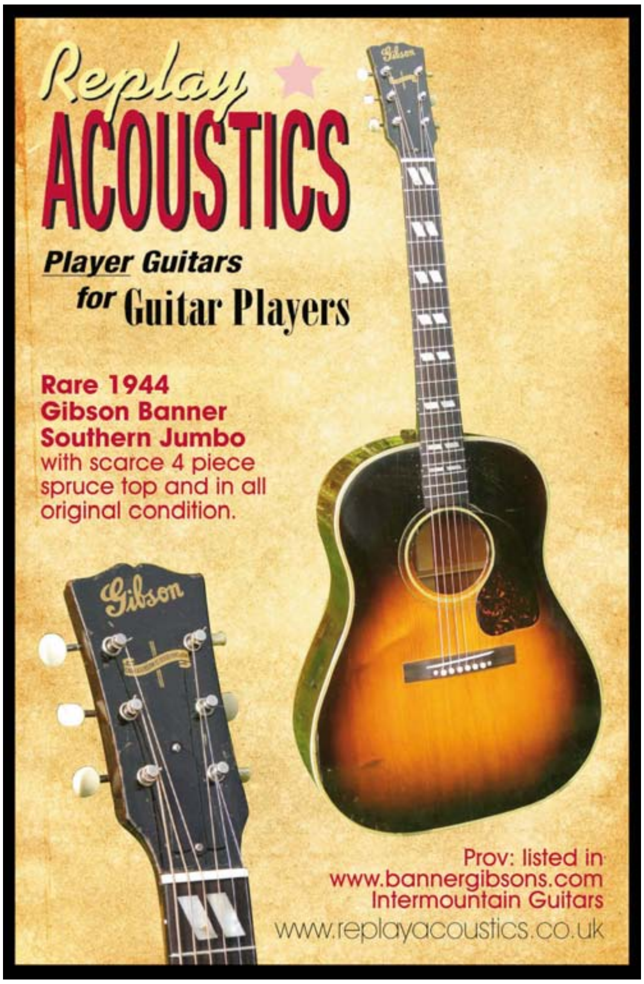
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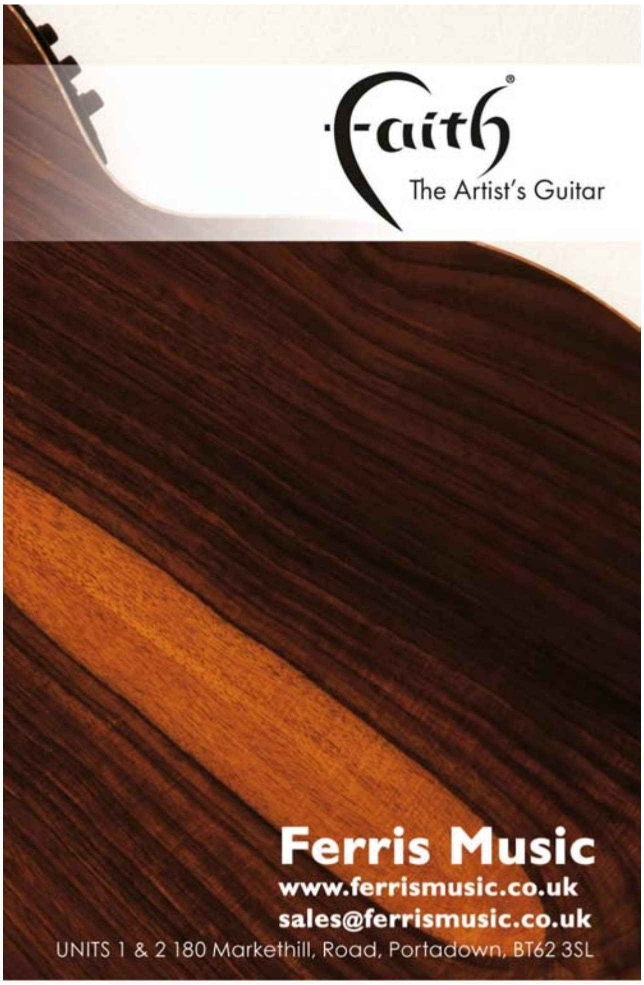
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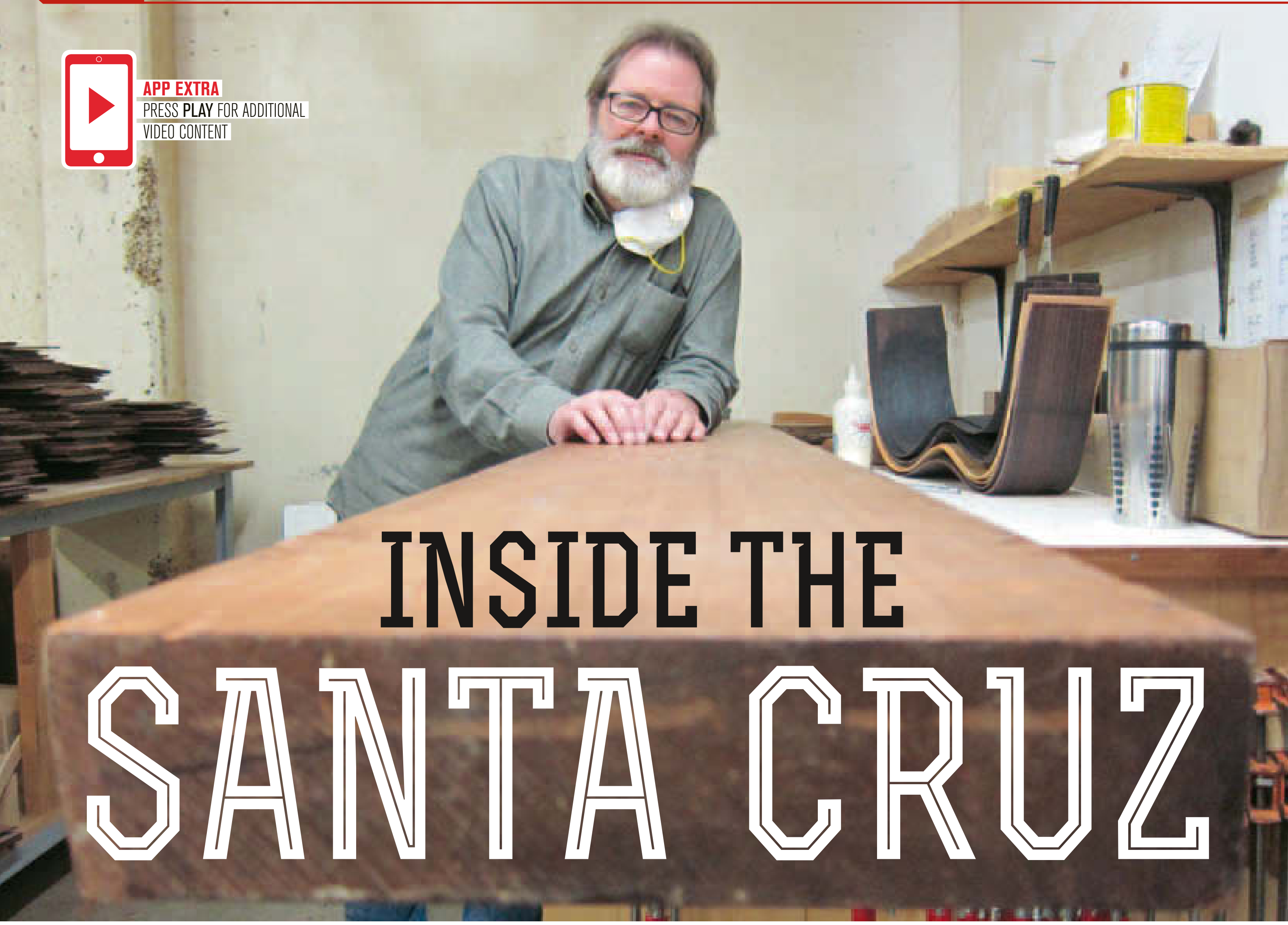


APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY FOR ADDITIONAL VIDEO CONTENT

INSIDE THE SANTA CRUZ CUSTOM SHOP

David Mead talks to Richard Hoover about how to go about ordering a custom instrument from the Santa Cruz Guitar Company.

'It might sound a little odd, but we've actually run this as a custom shop since the very beginning,' Richard tells us at the start of our transatlantic Skype conversation, probably refocusing popular opinion on the output of Santa Cruz. Indeed, around 75 percent of the guitars the company makes are custom and so it makes more sense to run things that way, instead of having a situation where an instrument is merely taken off the production line for customisation and put back again afterwards. Every guitar takes its turn in the workshop, whether it's custom or standard.

Usually, when someone approaches a custom builder, they have a sound in their head – but talking "sound" can be incredibly difficult. So how does Richard establish a rapport with a customer?

It comes down to comparative analysis: what do you have now and what do you like about it and what would you like to be different? A reason that keeps a lot of people from discussing "custom" with a luthier is that they're afraid that they don't have the vocabulary, so the simplest approach is comparing what you have already with what you want more or less of. Part of my job is to give people some peace of mind and comfort in what they already know and I use the analogy of a sound system because we're all capable of turning those knobs and moving those sliders to get what we want. When it comes to controlling the aspects of sound we can take four categories and get most of what people want to talk about. We can talk about volume – simple. We can talk about EQ or how loud the bass is in relation to midrange and treble. We can talk about tone, which in acoustic-speak is the quality of bright to dark and finally there's the quality of presence, which is the difference between the sound of a guitar you'd want for recording and the projection of a guitar that you'd want to fill the back of a concert hall. Those are the subjective things and that's why they let you move the sliders on an equaliser or turn the knobs for tone or volume. So they're the personal choices and different for everyone; there's no right or wrong and it doesn't matter what some expert on the internet tells you, it's your choice.

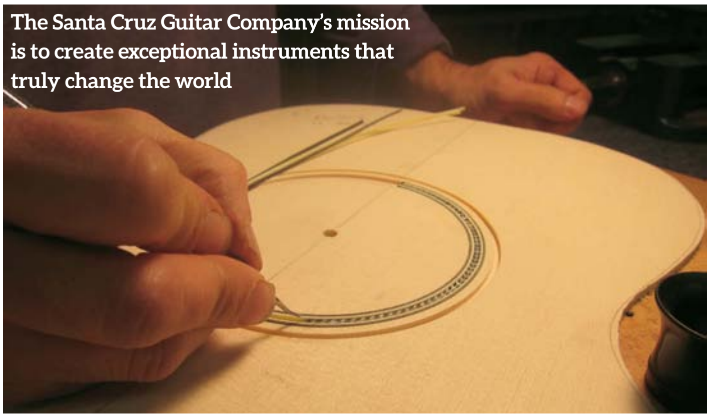
Everyone wants sustain and the development of overtones, so that the instrument is rich, full and colourful rather than flat. When people talk about finding "the one", the guitar that really sounds good, they're likely to be talking about good sustain and colourful, rich overtones. Those can be achieved by how the guitar is constructed and it's simply this: if you build the guitar in tune with itself so that it's in harmony, it will sustain and it will develop overtones.

We mentioned to Richard the Eric Skye custom model that we looked at in *Acoustic* a while ago.
That's a beautiful example of a custom collaboration. Here's a guy who plays a particular style, he's really practised, he knows what he wants and, talking to him, we had a pretty broad vocabulary to approach it with.

Founded in 1976, the Santa Cruz Guitar Company has brought boutique guitar making to the forefront of steel-string guitar making

The Eric Skye model is a small body size, but Eric said of it, "I love the simple vintage, vibe – but I also like knowing there's a Ferrari engine under the hood!" Indeed, it had volume and projection to spare, something that must be a difficult trick to pull off when making a 00 size guitar.
There are a couple of things that go into the volume of a guitar, which is actually the least important thing in an instrument today when you can play with a microphone. Eric plays unplugged, so he needed volume, but he didn't want volume at the expense of a good presence in all the ranges. So that model is slightly deeper from front to back and this is a shameless trick, to have the footprint and ergonomics of a smaller body with an increased airspace that would normally be found in a guitar with a larger one. So on the Eric Skye model we added depth to increase the airspace which increases the volume and, left alone, would increase the bass somewhat, but we can control that elsewhere. There's also a specific neck angle that gives us a predictable saddle height that also adds volume on that guitar.

Once upon a time a small-bodied guitar meant low volume and a lack of bass.
If you go back to the 1870s and perhaps before, you can find some surprisingly loud instruments. But as they entered into the production paradigm over time, guitars were made heavier to make them more durable, also, for the efficiencies of production, all the pieces went through a machine that would make them the same size. So the thickness of the top on a dreadnought was the same as the top on a single 0. What happened with the small body guitars was that the shorter scale meant that the strings were imparting less energy and that overly stiff top meant a quiet guitar. If you're kind you call it "mellow" but what you really mean is that it's subdued. So the efficiencies of mass production meant putting out a lot of guitars, but the small-bodied guitars were "quiet", but they don't have to be.


The Santa Cruz Guitar Company's mission is to create exceptional instruments that truly change the world

One part of the production process at Santa Cruz is the use of hot hide glue, a favourite with some luthiers. We wondered what qualities Richard feels that it lends to his instruments.
We use it because it dries like glass and things like Titebond don't dry to that hardness. When we combine hide glue with Adirondack spruce for bracing, we get a medium that vibration travels through more quickly; it keeps its velocity. So we add to the clarity of tone: it's brighter, clearer – nothing to do with treble, just brightness – and the vibration travels faster, giving a quicker response. So when you think about Eric Skye playing multiple notes in a short space of time, he needs separation and clarity between the notes so that you can hear everything he plays. And that stuff is actually accentuated further by the choice of spruce that gives it that quick response and clarity. So hide glue is part of that formula – and that's physics and it really works.

What sort of waiting list is there for a custom instrument from Santa Cruz at present?
I'll give you a clear explanation here. It'll start off sounding like I'm a politician, but there's actually method to this madness. We sell to dealers that sell to customers and our back-order consists of those dealers saving positions on our calendar. So we could be back-ordered for years, but the customer still has the opportunity to find a store that might have a place where the guitar could be started in the next eight weeks and therefore be able to receive an instrument in a few months. We only make 600 guitars a year, so most customers are shopping for availability where, in a mass production brand, they'd be shopping for price. So the answer is that someone could probably get a guitar in less than six months, but that depends on which store they talk to. Our actual back-order is about two years, but if I made that statement alone, we're going to lose business!

For more information on the Santa Cruz Guitar Company, visit their wonderful website: www.santacruzguitar.com

APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY TO HEAR THIS IN ACTION

SANTA CRUZ OM CUSTOM

Take Santa Cruz's reputation for excellence and add a degree of custom shop variability – **David Mead** is like a kid in a sweetshop!

It is, perhaps, not so widely known that the Santa Cruz Guitar Company offers a custom facility alongside its standard instrument range. The company, originally set up by Richard Hoover in 1976, already has a considerable reputation among players for some of the finest instruments available, its guitars receiving rave reviews wherever they land. But customers have a whole slew of options available when they order from Santa Cruz, meaning that the process of buying a new six-string can be finely tuned to an individual's tastes and needs. I spoke with Richard about his company's custom shop in the interview that accompanies the Santa Cruz Custom reviews in this issue, but for now, let's feast our eyes on one of its recent builds.

BUILD QUALITY AND FEATURES

The first Santa Cruz we're going to look at is an OM with some onboard custom refinements. Bear in mind that you can incorporate a considerable number of variables into your own guitar; things like nut width, body woods, scale length and so on. So if this one isn't an exact fit for your dream instrument, it's probably only a tweak or two away on an order form.

However, I'll admit up front that the OM is probably my favourite acoustic guitar body size. It's a Goldilocks thing: for me a dreadnought is often a tad too big and a parlour or OO slightly on the small side. Experience tells me that an OM is just right. So it was with a great deal of anticipation that I opened the case on this guitar and I must say that I wasn't disappointed. The extremely high build quality is obvious from the start. It looks clean and crisp and ready for business, so let's move in for a closer look.

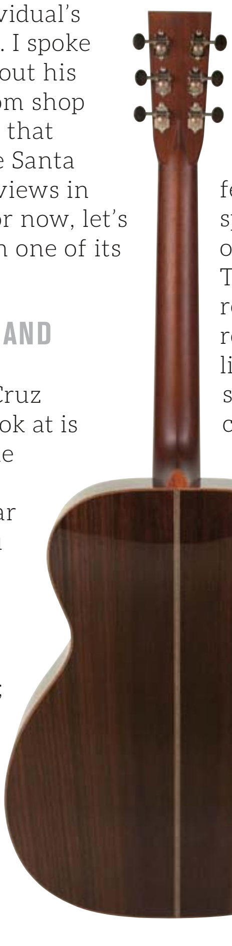
The OM's top is Italian spruce, a wood with similar features to German spruce both in terms of looks and tone. The two woods are renowned for a finely rounded treble with a little "bounce" to the sound as well. The colour here is slightly less creamy than you might expect from, say, Engelmann spruce and the Koa bindings around the body and soundhole set things off very nicely indeed.

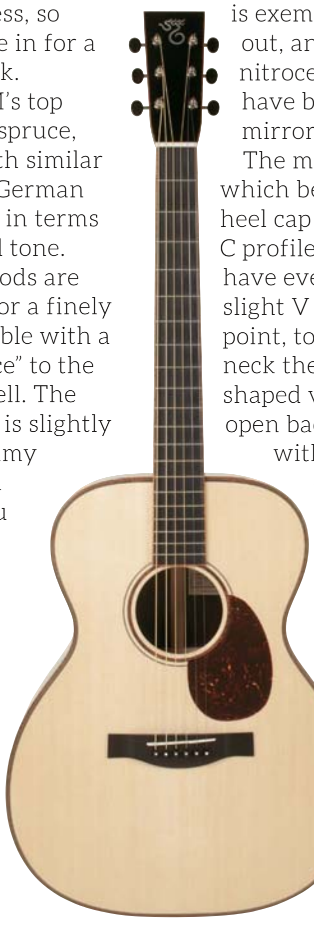
Under the hood, so to speak, and out of sight from all but the most prying eyes is Adirondack bracing which, when combined with the Italian spruce top, promises to be a fine formula for great sound indeed.

It's master grade Indian rosewood for the back and sides with a deep chocolate colour and straight grain, offset nicely with a "zipper pattern" centre strip. The finish to the body really is exemplary, inside and out, and its layers of nitrocellulose lacquer have been buffed to a mirror finish.

The mahogany neck – which begins with a Koa heel cap at its base – has a C profile to it and I might have even detected a slight V in the mix at this point, too. At the top of the neck there's a diamond-shaped volute and six open back Waverly tuners with ebony buttons either side of the headstock, which has the Santa Cruz logo emblazoned upon it in abalone.

Once past the 44mm bone nut, the ebony neck has been left clear of position markers, allowing the Koa binding to





SANTA CRUZ OM CUSTOM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Santa Cruz
Model: OM Custom
Retail Price: £5,199
Body Size: OM
Made In: USA
Top: Italian spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Waverly vintage open-back nickel
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 644.5mm
Strings Fitted: Elixir .012 - .053 80/20
Left Handers: Custom order
Gig Bag/Case Included: Ameritage hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: An OM with an outstanding array of tonal assets!
Cons: Side markers are a little difficult to see
Overall: A custom build of this quality would ensure that your ideal instrument is well within reach

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★½
Sound Quality	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★½

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Ivor Mairants
www.ivormairants.co.uk

The high build quality of this is evident the moment you pick it up

The guitar has not only the looks, but some first class tonal attributes

assume star billing as far as décor is concerned. Its bone for the string saddle, too, set in an ebony bridge with pearl-topped ebony string pins to round things off.

Overall this really is a beautiful instrument. Superbly understated in terms of furnishings, but I get the impression that a consummate amount of attention to detail is in evidence here. Even the tortoiseshell pick guard has a subtly bevelled edge which feels good to probing fingers.

SOUNDS AND PLAYABILITY

After just a few open string chords it's possible to tell that the OM has some first class tonal attributes. There's a separation to the notes that makes it possible to hear everything you play with equal clarity and the sustain is great, with both chords and single notes ringing on for ages. It's a bright sound – something that no doubt a little bit of maturity will mellow down slightly – but it's sweet at the same time. The bass response is good, too; drop tuned to D the guitar retains all its precision of tone, the bass cutting through enough without cluttering the midrange as it does so. My only criticism is that the position markers to the side of the fretboard get a little lost amidst the wild patterning of the Koa trim, which made fretboard leaps a little hit or miss to begin with. I think you'd get used to it fairly quickly, but it was a factor for me initially.

Played with a pick, chords just sing out with a considerable amount of volume and projection. Switch to fingerstyle and you're rewarded with amazing crispness and tone, making the Santa Cruz a guitar for all playing seasons – a true all-rounder.

The OM Custom really is a guitar that can handle anything – true all-rounder

CONCLUSION

I've been rendered virtually speechless by the excellence of Santa Cruz instruments before and I sense that there's a danger of it happening again here. The build quality of this guitar is of an incredibly high standard and the thought that you can build in your own custom variations into a variety of body shapes is an amazing asset for anyone who is still seeking perfection from an instrument. (See the interview with Richard Hoover for more custom info.) I began this review with the confession that the OM my is favourite body shape and so it would be understandable if my opinions carried with them a little bias. But I honestly think that most players would find this guitar an absolute delight and would encourage everyone to take one for a test drive as soon as possible.

David Mead

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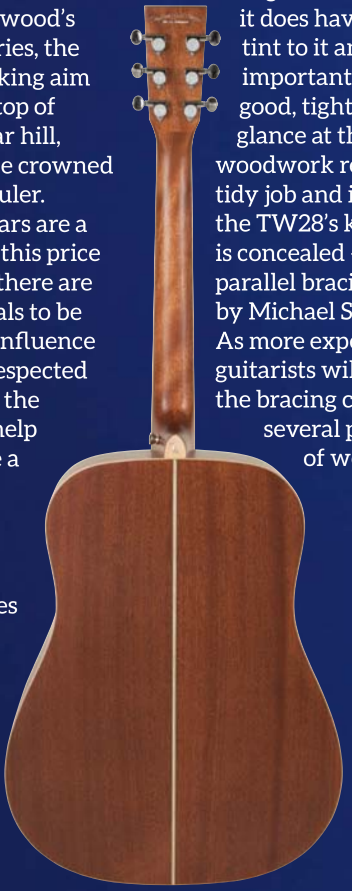
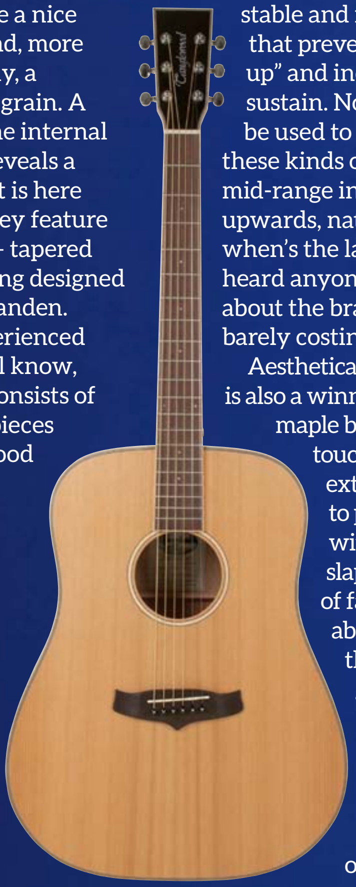
TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION IV TW28

With smart design and even smarter pricing, Tanglewood is out to prove that anyone can afford a dash of luthier-built class. **Alun Lower** finds out more…

Us guitarists are a rather lucky bunch, sometimes. It's been so long since we've had any awful entry-level guitars that today's up-and-coming superstars will have no idea of the horrors that their forebears had to endure. Indeed, we live in a time where master luthiers like Patrick James Eggle are designing top quality instruments well within the reach of the common man. And just as Faith enjoys the services of the illustrious Mr. Eggle, Tanglewood has its own genius-at-work in the form of Michael Sanden, who has lent his keen eye and know-how into creating the TW28 CSN.

Part of Tanglewood's Evolution IV Series, the TW28 CSN is taking aim squarely at the top of the budget guitar hill, determined to be crowned its undisputed ruler. Trouble is – guitars are a dime a dozen at this price range now and there are some terrific deals to be found. Can the influence of such a well-respected luthier make all the difference and help the TW28 make a much grander name for itself?





BUILD QUALITY

While sometimes I allow myself to be surprised when reviewing a new guitar, more often than not I'll look it up well in advance so that I approach the review with as much prior knowledge as possible. Very rarely do I manage to be both prepared and surprised, but that that's exactly what happened on this occasion. The image found on Tangelwood's website for the TW28 CSN is by no means inaccurate, but it definitely doesn't do justice to what is undeniably a handsome guitar and I found myself loading the website back up to make sure I hadn't looked up the wrong model.

Tanglewood has opted for a solid cedar top on this model and while it doesn't have the darkest, richest hue of a high-end example, it does have a nice tint to it and, more importantly, a good, tight grain. A glance at the internal woodwork reveals a tidy job and it is here the TW28's key feature is concealed – tapered parallel bracing designed by Michael Sanden. As more experienced guitarists will know, the bracing consists of several pieces of wood supporting the top of the guitar and is essentially the skeleton that holds your acoustic together, preventing the top from collapsing in on itself from the pressure exerted by the strings. It acts as a literal framework for your guitar's tone, too, but normally the bracing patterns on lower-priced guitars receive much less attention than their more expensive counterparts, so it's exciting to see that Tanglewood has paid great attention to the bracing on the TW28. This particular pattern is notable for its two braces running parallel to the bridge plate (hence the name), intended to result in a more stable and responsive top that prevents any "bellying up" and increases overall sustain. Now, we might be used to reading about these kinds of features in mid-range instruments (and upwards, naturally), but when's the last time you heard anyone go into detail about the bracing of a guitar barely costing over £200?

Aesthetically, the TW28 is also a winner – the use of maple binding is a classy touch that brings an extra dash of luxury to proceedings without resorting to slapping on masses of fake pearl and abalone. Another thing that doesn't get picked up in the images on Tanglewood's website is the beautiful rosewood veneer on the headstock,

TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION IV TW28 CSN

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Tanglewood
Model: Evolution IV TW28 CSN
Retail Price: £230
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Solid cedar
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: Chrome closed back
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: N/A
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP 11
Left Handers: Others in the range
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Wonderfully thought-out guitar with the input from a master luthier
Cons: Nothing to declare here!
Overall: A great sounding guitar for an astonishing price. Your search for a new guitar just got easier.

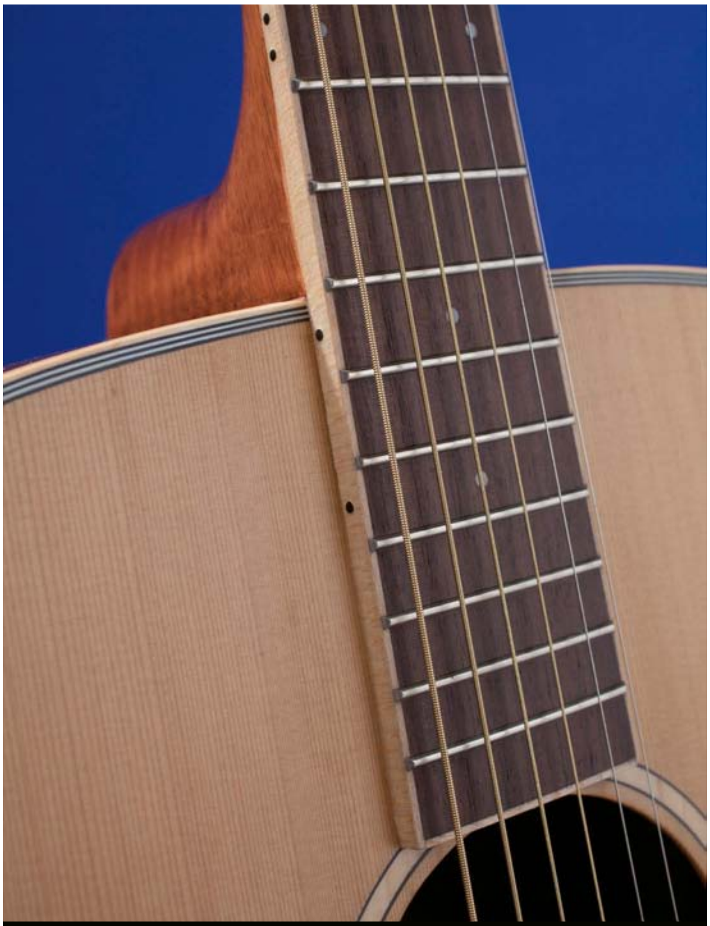
ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk


The maple binding is a classy touch bringing an extra dash of luxury

The headstock has a beautiful rosewood veneer finished in a deep gloss

tucked neatly away in the maple binding and finished in a lovely deep gloss. It looks very nice indeed and I genuinely felt as if I was holding a much more expensive instrument.

The back and sides are laminate mahogany as we generally expect at this price range, but it looks far from cheap and has been finished in a decent quality satin that has managed not to leave too much build up around the neck joint. Everything feels smooth, even and perfectly playable and that applies to the quality of the rosewood fingerboard and fretwork too, which although not quite buttery smooth, is a million miles away from the scratchy mess I encounter so often on similarly priced (and even more expensive) guitars.

This is all shaping up extremely well for Tanglewood so far and really the only criticism I can think of with the TW28 is the fact that it's a real beast of a guitar. Smaller-statured players might struggle to wrap their arms around this one – I personally found it much easier to play when I rested it on my right leg and turned it more to the side, which made strumming a lot more relaxed. But if you're looking at a dreadnought in the first place, chances are the bigger dimensions are exactly what you're looking for. And if you're reading this review with the thought of buying one of these guitars for someone else, just try and bear in mind the person's build and if possible what kind of style they play (or, perhaps, will play) – fingerstyle specialists will likely prefer something a little more manageable.

SOUND QUALITY

Being a dreadnought, the kind of tone we expect here is big, bold and balanced – and the TW28 certainly delivers on those three fronts with aplomb. Projection and volume, for starters, are very good indeed, singing out with strength and confidence. Even when you thrash those strings as hard as you can, the TW28 stays composed and collected.

For my tastes, a spruce and mahogany combo on an entry-level dreadnought can end up a little toppy and shrill, particularly when you're hitting out those big open chords with gusto. That's where the cedar top and the clever bracing system really work their magic. The TW28's tone is just a touch warmer and more open than a spruce-topped example, while staying a little more complex and dynamic than an all-mahogany instrument would sound. It's a really happy middle ground that places emphasis on clarity and versatility.

Sustain is also admirable so I can only assume that this is the Sanden-designed bracing once again proving its worth. I had hours of fun playing through my go-to riffs and songs, seeing how the guitar reacted and looking for any potential criticisms. And honestly, I've got nothing. Granted, an all-solid guitar will yield more complexity and harmonics – but that's obvious and unless this guitar was trying to force the best part of £500 out of your pocket, that argument really can't come into it.

CONCLUSION

As someone who normally prefers orchestra and grand auditorium bodies on acoustics, I can often find dreadnoughts leaving me a bit cold, but on this occasion I'll admit to being pleasantly surprised. If I was on a budget and looking to expand my collection tomorrow I think I would stop my search right here. For the money, you're getting a charming and responsive instrument that has much to offer aspiring songwriters and guitar enthusiasts alike. You just can't go far wrong with a combination of good looks, great construction, and dependable, expressive tones. The TW28 CSN has all that in spades and even comes with that added mojo of having a real luthier involved in the design process. It's a noticeable difference and ensures that this guitar comes highly recommended.

Alun Lower

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AUDEN CHESTER CEDAR

There's a new kid on the block – will it stand up to the big kids or get kicked out of the school yard? **Alun Lower** investigates...

There's no shortage of guitar builders these days. Especially in the world of acoustic guitars, it seems that every day brings a new name on the headstock of some mass-produced lump of wood produced on the other side of the world. Often, these companies can blur into one and it can be hard to distinguish one from another – but not, it seems, in the case of Auden Guitars. Founded by Doug Sparkes and luthier Rob Bowman, Auden is determined to stand apart from the crowd.

To do this, the company has put in place a set of standards it has dubbed the "Sound Source". This strict code of practice ensures that construction employees work in a safe environment with sensible hours and fair pay. In addition, all materials are sourced from FSC-approved suppliers – and, throughout this year, Auden donated the cost of one tree to the Trees for Cities initiative for every guitar sold. In 2015, they'll be partnering up with Mike Peters' Love, Hope, Strength Foundation. It's all very impressive stuff and shows that Auden is a company that cares about more than just shifting boxes and maximising profits.

Ethical dilemmas aside, we all know that overseas-manufactured guitars can also vary greatly in quality of construction. While it's clear that Auden has selected its manufacturer with great care, it also adds some extra kudos by ensuring that every single guitar undergoes final assembly, fret finishing, and electronics fitting in the UK before being personally inspected by head luthier Rob Bowman. The entire range has been developed with the input of a specially selected team of luthiers, musicians, retailers and recording engineers – including one Tom Chester, after whom this particular guitar is named. The company is clearly proud of its production values and as such invites every owner to visit the Northampton headquarters to be shown those vital last steps of construction and to have their own instrument set up exactly as they like it. Make no mistake – Auden guitars are designed and made by a certified panel of experts that care deeply about the quality of these instruments, and that makes reviewing the Chester a very exciting prospect indeed.

BUILD QUALITY

If Auden's aim was to create a range of guitars that blends classic features with modern design flair, then consider that objective well and truly nailed. There's simply no other way of saying this – the Chester is a *stunning* guitar. We're looking at an all-solid cedar and rosewood construction, and for all accounts these appear to be wonderful examples of the tonewoods. The cedar top is AAA-grade with a tight grain, and the rosewood back and sides are a beautifully deep chocolate brown – stripy and sumptuous under the high quality gloss finish and set off superbly by layered ebony and maple binding. Every clean line accents the guitar perfectly and every detail has been extremely well designed, even down to the label on the inside of the body and the logo on the headstock.

The body itself is a classically inspired 000-alike, supported by some extremely well crafted scalloped X-bracing. The dimensions are a little deeper and wider, but very much in the same vein as those most versatile and charming

AUDEN CHESTER CEDAR FULL BODY

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Auden
Model: Chester Cedar
Retail Price: £1,499
Body Size: 000
Made In: China / UK
Top: AAA cedar
Back and Sides: Solid Indian rosewood
Neck: African mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Schertler
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Schertler Lydia
Strings Fitted: High quality USA
Left Handers: Available to order
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: A thoroughly engaging and rewarding instrument to play; a joyous instrument that sings with clarity
Cons: Basic plugged-in sounds, but the Lydia is hidden and there's room for your own pickup if you wish
Overall: Stunning guitar from a great new company. Get out and play one for yourself – you won't be disappointed

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★☆
Value for Money	★★★★½

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Auden Guitars
www.audenguitars.com

It has a tone that is utterly intoxicating and which is full of rich overtones

Smart, modern, and throughly classy – the Auden Chester begs to be played

of the classic guitar shapes. An ebony fingerboard tops a mahogany neck, and there's a rosewood veneer on the headstock for good measure. The strings are locked in place by some attractive open-gear Schertler tuners, and are anchored to the body by an ebony bridge. Interestingly, the Chester comes supplied with not one but two different saddles – one bone, and one composite. The idea behind this is that the composite saddle contributes a more even transference to the undersaddle pickup, whereas the bone alternative should provide a better acoustic performance. I can't remember ever being graced with such an option before with any other guitar I've owned or reviewed, so to be presented with the choice is a really neat little touch. Not only that, but Auden also provide you with a clear pickguard in case you want to preserve the quality of the finish without compromising the guitar's rather fetching aesthetic qualities.

Finishing off the package is a Schertler Lydia Volume undersaddle pickup and preamp system. Believe it or not, despite being an undersaddle system the Lydia pickup is not piezo-based. Rather, the system utilises what Schertler call "air-chamber" technology, which is built around an ultra linear condenser microphone with a solid diaphragm. This then connects to a preamp with a single gain control accessed under the soundhole – the idea is that this should produce a natural, uncoloured sound to provide the ideal tonal base for your plugged-in performances.

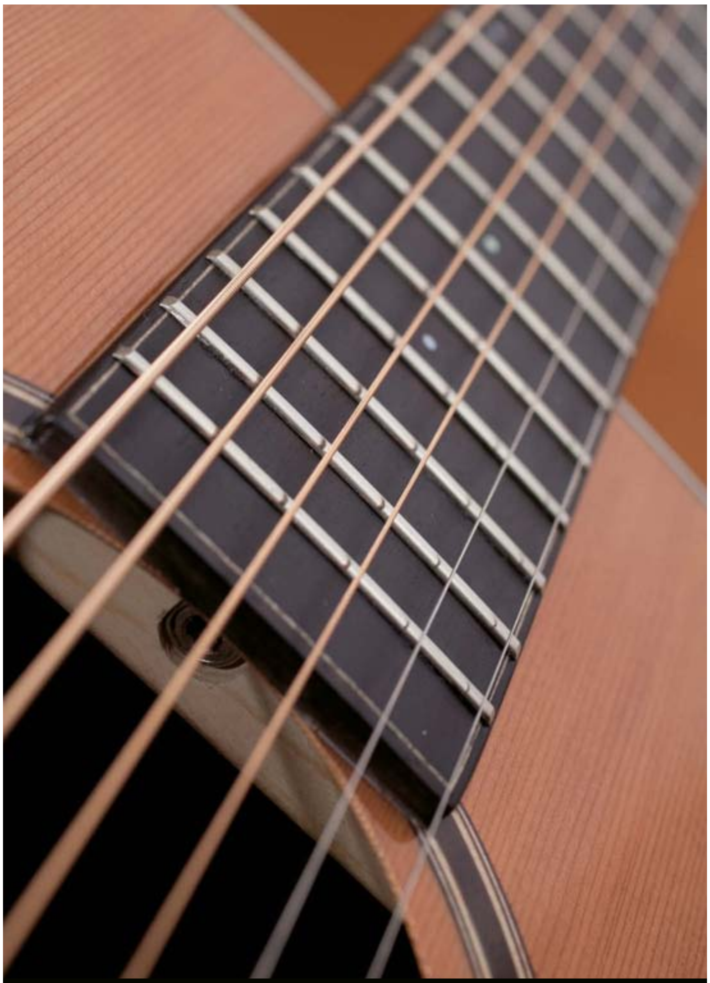
Unlike many outsourced guitars, you can really tell that the Chester has had a bit of extra love before it reaches your hands. The quality of the fretwork and overall finishing is up with the best examples of this price range. It may not have been made especially for you by a dedicated luthier sat in his workshop with no sunlight for months – but it feels damn close. It's a very promising start!

Auden deserves success for not just a great guitar, but a great guitar company

SOUND QUALITY

Acoustically, the Chester is every bit as enticing as its construction implies. Cedar and rosewood is a wonderful combination – rich, warm and thick as you like with bags of personality. High notes chirp and sing with clarity and precision, while the lower strings are sonorous and deep. It's a tone you just want to drink in, and it's utterly intoxicating. The slightly more generous body dimensions (compared to a traditional orchestra model) definitely make a difference

The Chester is an extremely engaging and rewarding instrument to play


From January 2015, Auden will offer a UK-made range of their guitars

– there's just that little more oomph to the low notes and thick definition to the highs.

The mids might not push quite as hard as a mahogany-bodied alternative, but the cedar warms things up a notch from a spruce-topped guitar and provides plenty of lovely rich harmonics. Chords and single note runs ring out with detail and texture no matter whether you prefer a fingerpicking or plectrum approach, though I daresay fans of the former may be slightly better served thanks to the overall dimensions. This is a bluesy, soulful guitar that wants to tell stories and the sublime tones mixed with supreme playability make for a truly rewarding playing experience.

Plugged-in performance can so often be a mixed bag with undersaddle pickups and if there's any criticism to be aimed at the Chester, it's here. With a steady hand, the Schertler Lydia is capable of producing some very good tones indeed. Whatever you do, don't whack that gain control all the way to the max – it's a big mistake and you'll be met with decidedly iffy results if you do so. Rather than produce a particularly styled "tone", the Lydia is all about providing a neutral blank canvass, with a transparent sound that can be easily manipulated by the player – and that's exactly what you get.

The Lydia can sound a little underwhelming on its own – and certainly for recording you should look at investing in a decent microphone to do justice to the many, many good qualities of the Chester's natural singing voice. For what it is, the Lydia excels at giving you an even platform for playing live – whether that'd through an amplifier or straight to the PA. I've played better electronics systems on cheaper guitars in the past, but I can honestly say that if I was buying this guitar the plugged-in sound would be low on my list of priorities – as it would be on any guitar that didn't have a side-mounted preamp with a variety of controls to play with. As it stands, the Lydia won't set your world on fire but if you know what you're getting beforehand then there's little chance that you will come away from the Auden disappointed.

CONCLUSION

I really can't think of any better way to sum up my feelings on the Chester better than simply saying… "I want one". I want one badly, and I feel like I've been waiting some time for a guitar like this to come along. After seeing so many guitars of similar origins come and go throughout the years, I really feel that Auden deserves success for coming up with not only an excellent guitar, but an excellent guitar company. Even from my admittedly limited time with the Chester, it's clear that Auden value their customers dearly and want to make them feel part of a special group – an experience, if you will. The strong work ethic and environmental conscience may not be a new idea but it's one that has been executed well and resulted in guitars that for all intents and purposes appear to be of exceptional quality.

The Chester itself is an extremely engaging and rewarding instrument to play, and one that is sure to return years if not decades of enjoyment. Smart, modern and thoroughly classy – this is a guitar that not only begs to be played, but demands it. If you have the opportunity to try one, embrace it with both hands – I very much doubt you'll be disappointed.
Alun Lower

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NEW RELEASES

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ARTIST	TITLE	LABEL	GENRE
Jimmy Aldridge & Sid Goldsmith	Let The Wind Blow High Or Low	Fellside	Folk
Manuel Barrueco	Chaconne – A Baroque Recital	Tonar	Classical
Steph Cameron	Sad-Eyed Lonesome Lady	Imports	Folk
Judy Collins	Sings Lennon & McCartney	Cleopatra	Folk Pop
Neil Diamond	Melody Road	Virgin EMI	Pop
Richard Durrant & Howard Beach	Guitar & Harpsichord	Longman	Classical
Justin Townes Earle	Single Mothers	Loose Music	Country
Alan James Eastwood	Seeds…	Cherry Tree	Acid Folk
Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn	Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn	Rounder	Bluegrass
Foster & Allen	Gold & Silver Days	DMG TV	Irish
José González	In Our Nature	EMI	Folk
Shakey Graves	And The War Came	Dualtone	Folk
John Lee Hooker	I'm Going Home	Devils Tunes	Blues
Howlin' Wolf	Howlin' Wolf	Hallmark	Blues
The Incredible String Band	Ducks On A Pond	Secret	Psych Folk
Nicola Jappelli	Carulli: Solo Guitar Music	Brilliant Classics	Classical
Katona Twins	Guitar Duo	Solo Musica	Classical
Kris Kristofferson	An Evening With Kris Kristofferson	Virgin	Country
Julian Lage & Chris Eldridge	Avalon	Modern Lore	Fingerstyle
Lily & Madeleine	Fumes	Asthmatic Kitty	Alt Folk
Johannes Möller / Laura Fraticelli	Johann Kaspar Mertz – Guitar Duets	Naxos	Classical
Harry Partch	Plectra & Percussion Dances	Bridge	Classical
Peter, Paul And Mary	Folk Routes – The First Two Albums	Jasmine	Folk
Pete Seeger	Waist Deep In The Big Muddy And Other Love Songs	Talking Elephant	Folk
Joan Shelley	Electric Ursa	No Quarter	Folk
Sylvie Simmons	Sylvie	Light In The Attic	Folk
Status Quo	Aquostic – Stripped Bare	Fourth Chord	Rock
Steeleye Span	Wintersmith	Park	Folk Rock
Sunjay	Sunjay	New Mountain	Folk
Chip Taylor	The Little Prayers Trilogy	Trainwreck	Country
Chris Thile & Edgar Meyer	Bass & Mandolin	Nonesuch	Bluegrass
We Banjo 3	Gather The Good	WB3	Americana
Peter White	Smile	Heads Up	Jazz
Jesse Winchester	A Reasonable Amount Of Trouble	Red House	Blues
Mac Wiseman	Songs From My Mother's Hand	Wrinkled	Bluegrass
You + Me	Rose Ave.	RCA	Country
Yusuf	Tell 'Em I'm Gone	Sony Music	Folk
Various Artists	Male Voices Of Fado	Arc Music	Fado
Various Artists	Songs Of The Spanish Civil War	Smithsonian	Folk
Various Artists	The Rough Guide To Fado Legends	World Music	Fado

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THE NEXT BIG THING

MILLERS DAUGHTER

Millers Daughter could just be the next radio sensation; these twin sisters from Wiltshire, with their crystalline harmonies, intricate guitar style and glossy production, have all the ingredients to set Radio 2 on fire. Their background has steered them inexorably toward this career; their great grandfather won a competition to become a singing comic, but couldn't take up his prize due to his growing family, and it was handed to the runner up, an unknown youngster called George Formby. This sort of formative myth can do wonders for a young musician's self belief, but Christie and Louise Miller are almost too good to be true; blonde, blue-eyed twins, one left-handed and one-right handed; playing guitar together on stage, it's tempting to think they've been invented for TV purposes. The reality is otherwise; Christie and Louise are real, talented, and on the rise – and *Acoustic* took the opportunity to discuss their album *So Hollywood*.

Your PR makes a lot of your "mirror twins" status. Growing up that way can't help but be important to you, but do you get tired of being defined by it?

In a way, yes. We never even think of ourselves as twins, we don't even realise we're left- and right-handed a lot, and people think it's contrived to be like that. It's a unique look, nobody else has the same USP. They did try to make my sister right-handed at school, but it didn't work! I suppose when you grow up as twins, it's what you know, so it doesn't feel like anything different or special.

The right-handed and left-handed thing looks great on stage, but do you notice any other differences connected to it? Do you think about music, play, and write differently?

I guess, sort of automatically, one does a rhythmic part and one does a hook. We kind of think as one brain; we like to challenge ourselves, we don't like to make it easy, we use tricky chords. Who does what just naturally happens, and we'll shift as the song goes on, not deliberately, it just happens. Mostly, we work things up together; one of us will start with a melody on guitar; the lyrics side of things come when all the guitars are finished. We think with our guitars, as much as anything; it's always guitars first. I don't think there's any great difference in how we play or think.

Watching videos of you in session, the intricacy of your playing stands out, but on a lot of the album tracks, it's masked by big production. What were you aiming at with that change?

We've always written for a band, like a big band sound; we grew up with people like the Bangles, Wilson Phillips, and we do love that glossy production, but we were thinking about dialling it down a bit for the next one. First of all, we thought we'd write a big, Bangles-type thing, but when we go to do it live it's a different beast, especially when it's just the two of us. Our next album will be raw; more like what we could do live. On the album, we've got three harmonies, like the Eagles, but live, we never play the same thing. We don't want to play the same things live, who wants to go to a gig and just put the record on? We don't write with the intention of doing it stripped back; we want everyone to get the songs first, and then get interested in what we do. [Fleetwood Mac's album] *Rumours* was really polished, and I know that Lyndsey Buckingham wanted to get away from that with *Tusk*. We don't want to be predictable.

Who else do you work with in a live situation and on the album? What do they bring to the mix, and is it hard for them to break into the sister thing?

Peter Gordeno did all of the piano on 'Lay My Head Down', though we sung him the melodies we wanted, we knew what

we wanted him to play. The drummer, Geoff Dugmore, was at first playing it too softly, and we asked him to make the drums like big fat hippos, and he really did that. Then there was Jamie Scott, playing guitar, who has his own complicated style, his timing is not like ours. We have our own timing, and people have to fit into that. We tried to do all the guitars ourselves. For the live band, we want to add a cajon, an acoustic bass, and maybe a third harmony.

Your bio mentions that heartbreak triggers your songwriting. What else inspires you?
Love is a massive topic for everyone, isn't it? We're quite spiritual, so things that have happened as well, like the strength of your friends and family in a time of need; I had Crohn's disease, and songs like 'Lay Your Head Down' are about that. Everything comes back to love, but it doesn't have to be about romance, it can be about friends. We want it to feel good somehow, even if the words are bittersweet.

Can you tell us a little about the guitars you use live and on the record?
Louise: I play a Breedlove, and I didn't actually know about Breedlove until I played one. It was in an old guitar shop in London; I didn't look at the price, I just played every guitar in the shop, and that one spoke to me. We went looking for Taylors originally (we both bought a Baby Taylor), and I thought my lifelong guitar would be a Taylor, and maybe it will, but I can't get away from that Breedlove. It's an SC25/R and it reminds me of the Rick Turner that Lyndsey Buckingham plays, but it's all about the tone for me; I had no idea that Breedlove guitars were so good. Some people say we play acoustic like it's an electric, and I hate that. People will say, "Can you not play electric then?" which is ridiculous, how would that be harder? I take my Baby Taylor everywhere with me.
Christie: I play a Patrick James Eggle acoustic. It's a great guitar – but it's surprisingly hard to find good acoustic guitars for left-handed players. I would like to have a cutaway, but that's even harder for lefties. The Baby Taylors have more of a boxy, punchy sound – more Ed Sheeran – which is nice. I also have a Fender Japan Tele for the lead stuff.

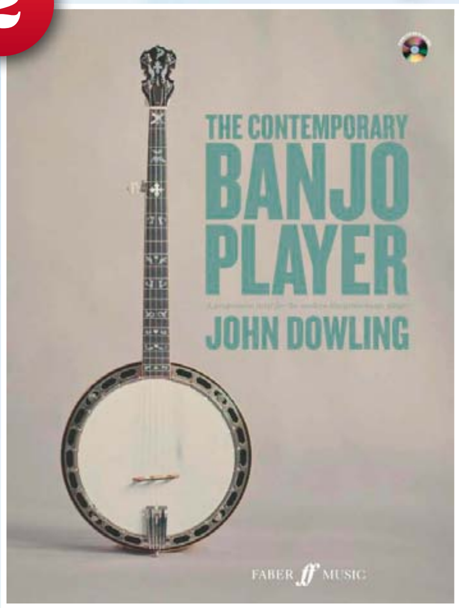
"We think with our guitars, as much as anything; it's always guitars first. I don't think there's any great difference in how we play or think."

Your mother was a singer. How much impact did she have on your desire to play music when you were growing up?
Lots – the love of a good band, and also harmonies came from her, but the guitar part of our musicality didn't come from our mum, we developed that ourselves. Our great grandfather apparently died on stage, singing 'Nearer My God To Thee', which is quite a song to go out on! We picked up playing the guitar before the days of YouTube, so we were listening to Fleetwood Mac, but we didn't know how Lyndsey played, we only found out later that he played fingerstyle. We used to go every week and watch my mum play; her band used to do Toto, Bonnie Raitt, blues covers, the Eagles, and we'd be dragged along, hear the rehearsals, see the gigs. We'd be sent to bed, and they'd be down here rehearsing – and we'd want to do it, too.

Tell us a bit about your live experiences so far, and what you've got planned.
It's funny, because we went to America before, with another band; we played in the Living Room, where Norah Jones played, and we played our song 'So Hollywood' in Hollywood, which was really surreal. We also played at the Yeehaw festival – the UK's number one country festival – and that was fun, too. We have some big things coming up; we're obviously touring, our label is based in Paris, so we're going over there, and we're looking forward to gigging with a little bit more backup. Gigging on your own is such a hard thing to do as there's nobody there to help you out if it starts to go wrong. We're doing a big collaboration album with some other artists for the Radio 2 80th birthday. We covered 'Head Over Heels', by Tears for Fears – and Ali Thompson, whose brother is in Supertramp, produced it. We recorded it and sent it off, and they said they loved it, but everyone else on the album is huge. Ed Sheeran, Kylie Minogue – people like that! We've got another big project coming, called The Music Cube, where we play in Westfield Shopping Centre in a cube, and they can only hear you if they wear headphones or tap into it with their phones, and the promotion is going to be huge. They did it in America, with people like Rihanna, so it's very exciting to be involved in something so new to the UK.

Millers Daughter's So Hollywood *is out now.*
www.millersdaughtermusic.co.uk
Sam Wise

Christmas Gift Guide



1 C.F. MARTIN & CO. LITTLE MARTIN LX1

Price: £379

About: It goes without saying, small-bodied guitars are in – and Martin's Little Martin is one of the best for the buck. Like its predecessors, this latest addition to the Martin line is built with the same Martin quality craftsmanship, with an emphasis on producing great sound in a smaller guitar. The Little Martin is durable and easy to play. The Little Martin comes with a padded gig bag. The top is solid Sitka spruce, the back and sides are mahogany high-pressure laminate and there's a 23-inch scale length with 20 frets. If you fancy a little upgrade, check out the LX1E with the Fishman Isys T – or you could check out Ed Sheeran's signature LX1E.

Contact: www.westsidedistribution.com

2 THE CONTEMPORARY BANJO PLAYER BY JOHN DOWLING

Price: £16.99

About: This unique, comprehensive tutor for the five-string bluegrass banjo player covers not only the basics of bluegrass, but also teaches you how to expand and develop your playing and diversify into other musical styles. The book is suitable for players of every level and is packed with photos, techniques, exercises and full songs to learn. With an accompanying CD containing demonstration tracks, it covers all the basics including rolls, hammers, slides, harmonics, percussive playing, finger-picking guitar style, and more!

Contact: www.fabermusic.com

3 ETHOS CUSTOM BRANDS AMBERQUOISE STRAP

Price: £125

About: Width: 3 inches. Length: adjustable tailpiece from 45–56 inches. Handcrafted by master artisan Chad Little from his company in Sallisaw, Oklahoma. Original, stunning designs at a level of craftsmanship and class that is next to none, making these some of the finest straps ever made. It's the perfect accessory for a world-class instrument.

Contact: www.thenorthamericanguitar.com

4 STAND-MADE GUITAR STANDS

Price: £125 - £245

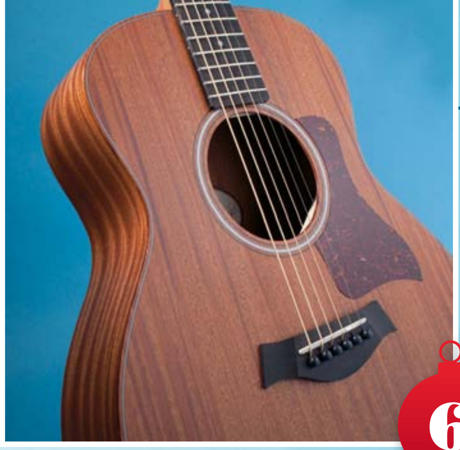
About: Brand new UK company Stand-Made is offering custom made guitar stands for the discerning guitar player. The theme is vintage inspired, handmade oak stands with the capacity to hold up to five guitars – or custom order one for more options and more space for your precious instruments. Prices start at £125 for a one-guitar capacity stand, and go up to £245 for a five-guitar capacity stand. They come in a range of finishes and can be completely customised to your tastes. Check out the website for all the options and feast your eyes upon these exquisite stands from a brilliant new UK company.

Contact: www.stand-made.co.uk

5 DITTO LOOPER

Price: £79

About: Ditto Looper was designed from the ground up with guitarists in mind. Hey, we play too, so it's what made sense to us. We made sure Ditto Looper takes up minimal space on your board, but



still has the essential "make your guitar-heart jump" features such as true bypass and analogue-dry-through making sure your tone stays uncoloured. Ditto Looper makes looping as easy as 1-2-3. No hassle or needlessly complicated stuff, Ditto Looper is boiled down to the essentials and makes control intuitive yet flexible, so guitarists can focus on what matters most: playing and performing. You press once to record, press once again to play the loop. Press once to add another layer of sounds (something you can keep repeating until you run out of ideas). You press and hold to undo a layer and press and hold again to redo. Press twice to stop, after which you can press and hold to clear the loop. Ah, if only life were this simple.

Contact: www.tcelectronic.com

6 TAYLOR GS MINI MAHOGANY

Price: £503

About: The Taylor GS Mini has been around for a few years now, but with the sudden surge in interest in both smaller bodied and mahogany topped guitars, we thought that it was time to take a look at an instrument that combines both of these features into a neat little package. Furthermore, it's a genuine Taylor acoustic for just a smidge over £500. If a mahogany top is not particularly your cup of tea then it's available in a Sitka spruce/sapele combo or even a slightly more exotic Hawaiian koa/koa variation. But whatever your tastes in timber, if you're looking for a small body guitar for either travel, fun or even serious playing, don't give the GS-Mini a miss, because it really is a corker.

Contact: www.taylorguitars.com

7 LR BAGGS M1 PICKUP

Price: £195

About: The M1 is for players who love big acoustic tone with high feedback resistance on any stage. Combining the natural characteristics of your guitar's soundboard with a punchy string attack, the M1's body-sensitive design provides enhanced realism while cutting through a loud mix. The M1 is a patented humbucking pickup with a twist. In a common stacked humbucker, the lower coil cancels hum, but doesn't contribute anything positive to the sound. Baggs unlocks the lower coil with a carefully tuned support that allows it to capture higher frequency resonances. As the pickup moves with the guitar's soundboard, a body signal is created in the suspended coil that adds presence and realism to your amplified sound. Available as the M1 active, or the M1 passive. The M1 Active is much less prone to feedback than mic-plus-undersaddle pickup systems, making it ideal for onstage use.

Contact: www.stringsandthings.co.uk

8 G7TH PERFORMANCE 2 CAPO

Price: £29.95

About: The new Performance 2 gives you the ultimate capo experience. Not only have we made it slimmer and lighter, but we have also reversed its patented clutch mechanism, which gives it a lightning fast squeeze-on, squeeze-off action. It has also been designed to store behind the nut or on the peghead when not in use. The G7th Performance 2 is smaller, faster, and lighter.

Contact: www.g7th.com

9 VARI-GRIP HAND EXERCISER

Price: £14.99

About: Designed to develop and maintain the strength and dexterity of your fingers, hands, and forearms, the Planet Waves Vari-Grip features an ergonomic design and variable tension that is customisable for each individual finger. The reversible moulded grip even uncovers simulated strings to help develop and maintain finger calluses when you are away from your instrument. Planet Waves Varigrip, the ultimate conditioning tool for musicians. Vari-Grip is the ultimate all-in-one hand, wrist, and forearm fitness tool.

Contact: www.daddario.com

10 C.F. MARTIN & CO. 0XK SOPRANO UKULELE

Price: £299

About: The 0XK was the first ukulele model offered as part of Martin's popular X-Series. This instrument's soprano-size top, back and sides are constructed from Hawaiian koa-pattern high pressure laminate (HPL). Martin padded bag included. With its strong Stratabond neck and durable HPL body, the 0XK Uke is perfect for moonlight serenading on the beach.

Contact: www.martinguitar.com

11 TC ELECTRONIC POLYTUNE 2

Price: £69

About: The evolution of a revolution, PolyTune 2 hits all the right notes as the next generation of the world's first polyphonic tuner. Strum all your strings at once and the PolyTune 2 can tell you which strings need tuning. Enhanced performance means that the PolyTune 2 has maximum precision. Use the PolyTune at gigs any time of the day or night and be sure you'll be able to see the clear overview. The new ambient light sensor will always make sure the display has the right brightness. TC Electronic's MonoPoly technology can recognise whether you play one or more strings and replies with the appropriate tuning mode. True bypass allows for silent tuning when engaged, and no interference when the pedal is bypassed.

Contact: www.gear4music.com

12 C.F. MARTIN & CO. RETRO STRINGS

Price: £13.49

About: Martin Retro acoustic guitar strings are crafted from a long-lasting proprietary nickel-based alloy blend that mellows quickly to a warm vintage tone that brings out the unique, woody sounds in your guitar. These are some of our favourite strings – and some of the best you can buy.

Contact: www.martinguitar.com

13 MARSHALL AS50D LIMITED EDITION

Price: £269

About: The 50 Watt AS50D has two specially designed eight Celestion speakers and a high fidelity polymer dome tweeter, for rich clean tones and brilliant highs. Designed for a variety of different acoustic instruments, the AS50D has a range of input features, so it can accommodate instruments with magnetic pickups, piezos and microphones passive or condenser. After 20 years of being perhaps the most popular acoustic amp in the world the AS50D celebrates this milestone with a beautiful cream limited edition.

Contact: www.marshallamps.com

14 FAITH PJE LONDON PLANE TREE

Price: £1,499

About: Plane trees can be seen lining the wide avenues of many towns and cities around the world. The particular sets of tonewood used on these models originated in the streets of London, so literally contain a part of the nation's capital. London Plane Tree wood is hard, with a close grain and is light brown in colour, and when matched to high grade Engelmann Spruce, the resulting tone is clear, yet warm and expressive. This limited run of Faith PJE Signature London Plane tree models are offered in the Baby Jumbo Neptune shape with a cutaway. The top is high grade

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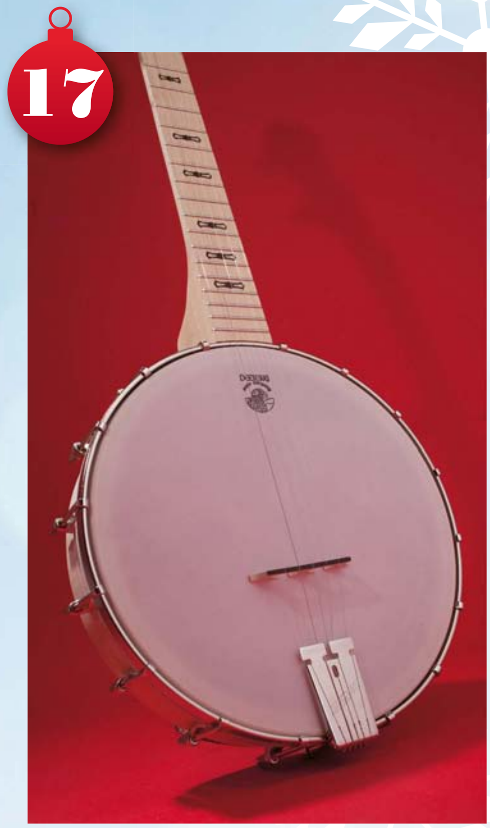


spruce with Macassan ebony binding, end strips and back strips. This model features a 45mm wide nut and used hand-finished bone for both nut and saddle. There are only a handful of guitars available during and are supplied on a first come, first served basis.
Contact: www.faithguitars.com

15 GREAT BRITISH BANJO CO. SHACKLETON BEER

Price: £12.95
About: Brewed in Norfolk, by an award winning (and banjo-playing) craftsman brewer, Shackleton bottle-conditioned and cask-conditioned ales are full of flavour and character: a very suitable celebration of the golden age of polar exploration! Available in gift packs of 3 x 500ml bottles, and in 36-pint home-serve boxes.
Contact: www.greatbritishbanjocompany.com

16 SHUBB DELUXE CAPO SDC1

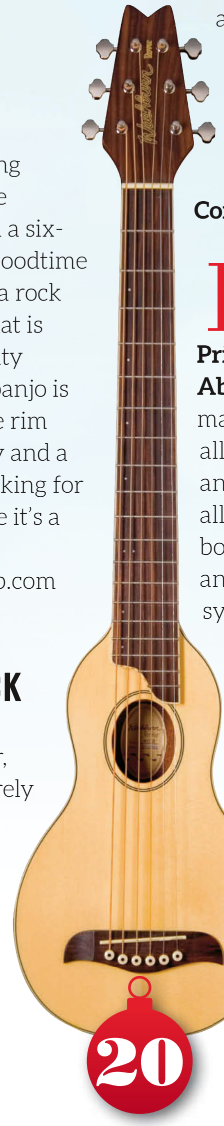
Price: £24.49
About: Crafted from stainless steel, its roller design provides ultimately smooth operation. What makes the Shubb capo so special? For one thing, its ingenious design: a patented locking action, which provides an unrivalled combination of power, speed, accuracy and ease of use. One smooth flip of the lever locks it securely in place and removes it just as quickly. Its special rubber is designed to work just like a fingertip, so it doesn't bend the strings over the frets. As a result, no retuning is necessary.
Contact: www.jhs.co.uk

17 DEERING GOODTIME

Price: £295
About: Eagle Music's best selling open back five-string banjo, the Deering Goodtime, comes with a six-year guarantee. The Deering Goodtime is built in California, USA. It is a rock maple banjo with a price tag that is incredible for such a high quality instrument. The heart of this banjo is the three-ply solid violin maple rim that provides you with stability and a great banjo sound. If you're looking for a banjo to start with, make sure it's a Deering Goodtime.
Contact: www.eaglemusicshop.com

18 LOWDEN PLAYER'S PACK

Price: £75
About: Short of an actual guitar, this Lowden Player's Pack is surely the perfect Christmas gift for any Lowden fan on your list. Whether the recipient is a current or future owner of a Lowden, we believe that this pack will be the perfect accompaniment to either their guitar, or their dreams of one! Featuring an organic cotton limited edition 40th anniversary T-shirt, and a brown leather Lowden guitar strap, along with a polishing cloth, mug, catalogue, and gift bag, this gift pack represents both the style and the quality that Lowden is known for. All Lowden shop purchases can be shipped worldwide.
Contact: www.lowdenguitars.com

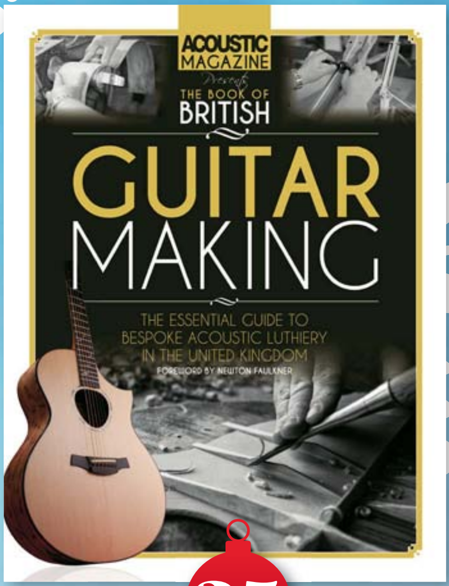


19 COLE CLARK CCFL1EC-BM

Price: £1,699
About: Cole Clark guitars are proudly made in Melbourne using the finest, all-solid tonewoods from Australia and abroad. The CCFL1EC-B features all solid timber cutaway dreadnought body size with internally carved top and back, Cole Clark two way pickup system, nitrocellulose (natural satin) finish, solid Bunya top, Queensland maple back and sides and includes a deluxe Cole Clark hard case.
Contact: www.thezedmusiccafe.com

20 WASHBURN RO10 ROVER

Price: £132
About: This light travel guitar comes with full-size fretboard and a case that can be stowed in an overhead locker. The



high-quality RO10 steel string guitar is built with a solid spruce top, a mahogany neck and body, Rosewood fingerboard, and quality geared tuners.
Contact: www.soundtech.co.uk

21 FAITH VENUS NAKED

Price: £439
About: The Faith Naked series Venus is a real winner having picked up the Music Industry Association's 2013 best acoustic guitar award. Staying true to Faith Guitars' ethos of all-solid construction, the Naked Venus model offers a solid Engelmann spruce top and solid mahogany back and sides, yet manages to do so at a very reasonable price. This choice of timber will deliver a superb, full range tone that will, of course, mature and further improve with age. The all satin finish also adds to the tonal delivery by allowing the top, back and sides to move freely and thus resonate with ease.
Contact: www.faithguitars.com

22 ELIXIR HD LIGHTS

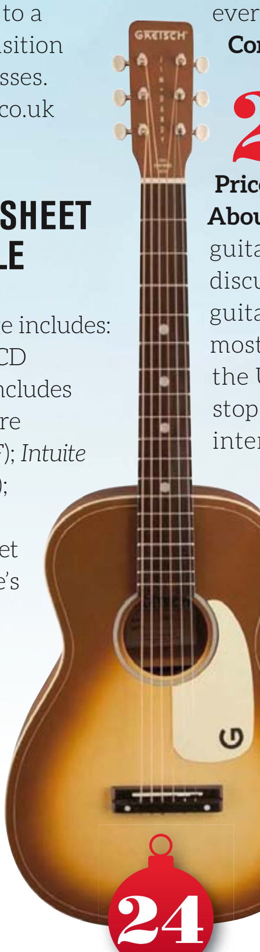
Price: £14.99
About: We all know that trying a different gauge of string on our guitars can often yield some unexpected results. Apart from the general feel, there are tonal and dynamic enhancements to be had as well; a heavier gauge will increase volume and sometimes bring out the bass a little more. A lighter gauge will add shimmer and ease up the lower mids – that kind of thing. In short, you have a heavy top, skinny bottom sort of idea. Fundamentally, Elixir has taken the top two strings from their .013 - .056 set and the D, A and E strings from their .012 - .053 – while the new kid on the block is the slightly heavier G string – here, they've upped the gauge from the standard light gauge's .024 to a .025 to smooth out the transition between the trebles and basses.
Contact: www.elixirstrings.co.uk

23 PIERRE BENSUSAN SHEET MUSIC & DVD BUNDLE

Price: £99
About: This new gift package includes: *Encore* – the new triple live CD featuring 35 classic tracks (includes free MP3 version of the entire album); the guitar book (PDF); *Intuite* TAB/sheet music book (PDF); *Altiplanos* TAB/sheet music book (PDF); *Vividly* TAB/sheet music book (PDF); and Pierre's DADGAD tuition DVDs (volumes one and two).
Contact: www. pierrebensusan.com

24 GRETSCH JIM DANDY FLAT TOP

Price: £148
About: Bang-on quality and dapper good looks make this second-edition limited release Gretsch Jim Dandy G9520-BRB a must-have for your collection. Faithful to the Gretsch "Rex" parlor guitars of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the limited-release Bronze Burst "Jim Dandy" Flat Top embodies everything that was great about everyone's first guitar.
Contact: www.gretschguitars.com



25 BOOK OF BRITISH GUITAR MAKING

Price: £7.99
About: In this essential guide to British guitar making, *Acoustic* magazine discusses the importance of custom guitar building and profiles the 25 most influential guitars makers from the United Kingdom. This is a one-stop-shop for guitar aficionados interested in commissioning a custom acoustic guitar, makers looking to learn from the best in the business, and everyone else who loves the wonderful world of exquisite luthiery. As well as interviews with the guitar makers who have shaped the industry, Newton Faulkner tells us why keeping the UK custom guitar build scene alive is so important.
Contact: www. virtualnewsagent.com

12 STRING CORNER

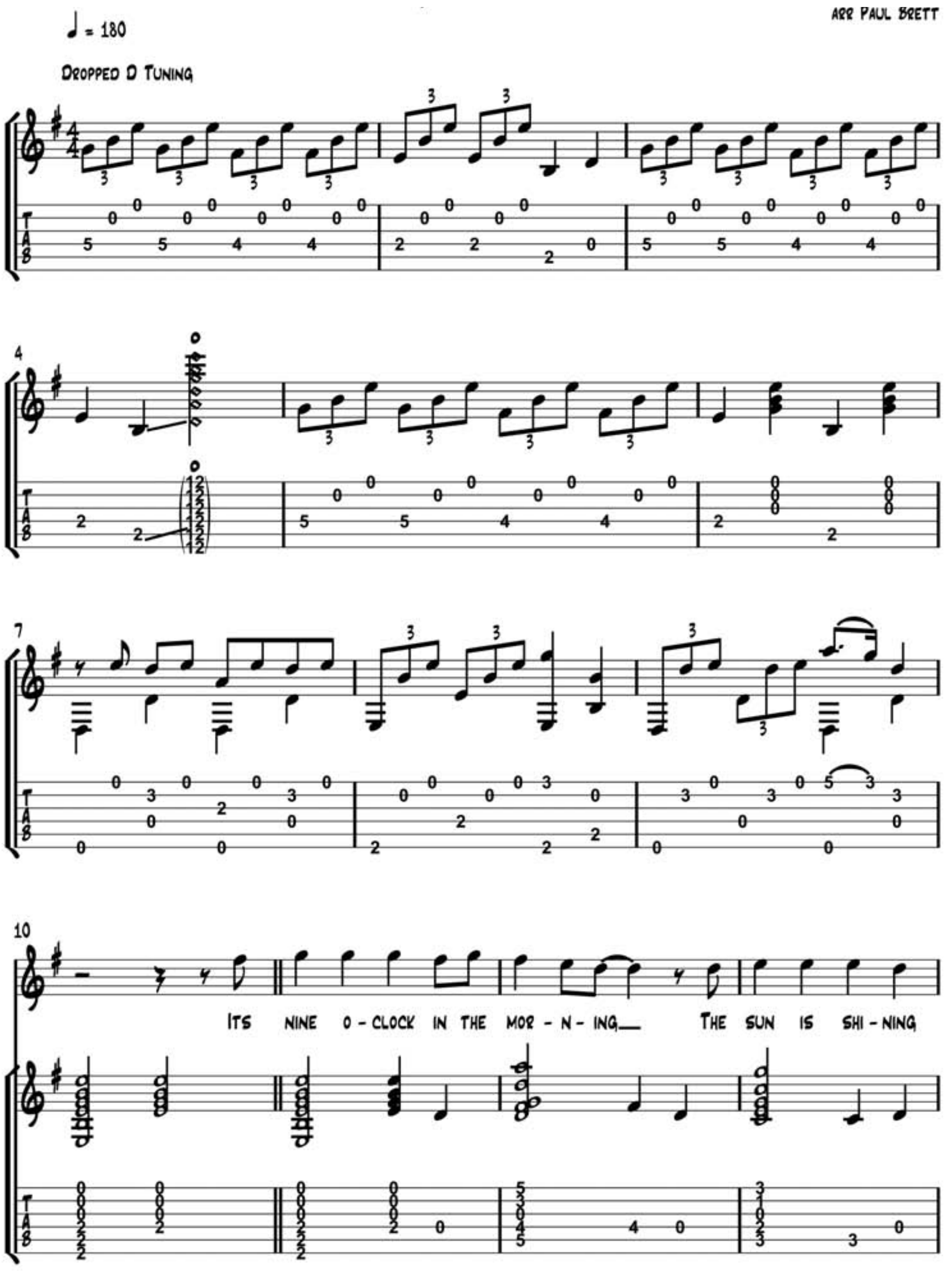
Paul Brett on Bob Dylan, Nic Jones, Led Zeppelin... and the Gallis Pole.

This month we're looking at an old folk song that has taken on many forms over the years. 'The Maid Freed From The Gallows', 'The Gallis Pole', The Hangman's Pole', 'Gallows Pole' are all titles based around this folk song which has survived for centuries. Its main lyrical theme is that of a condemned maiden pleading for someone to buy her freedom from the executioner. Lead Belly recorded the folk song in 1939 as 'The Gallis Pole'. Bob Dylan offered his version in 1963 entitled 'Seven Curses', which was thematically similar. How about Nic Jones' version called 'Prickly Bush'? Led Zeppelin offered the most famous variation with 'Gallows Pole' on the album *Led Zeppelin III*.

As I have been recording an album of classic blues songs arranged for 12-string and voice – which will also be accompanied by tab book – I have succumbed to adding my version of this tune called 'Hangman's Pole' to the list, joining the long list of other artists who've done the same. In fact, the version that'll appear on my album is not really precise, in terms of the lyrics, and does differ from the other versions but it does reference the hangman theory. Unlike Lead Belly's version of this tune, I have incorporated verses using arpeggios in the right hand that give the tune and vocal lines a lift. Save me from the Hangman's Pole – or the right hand arpeggio on a twelver.

Paul Brett

'HANGMAN'S POLE' BY PAUL BRETT



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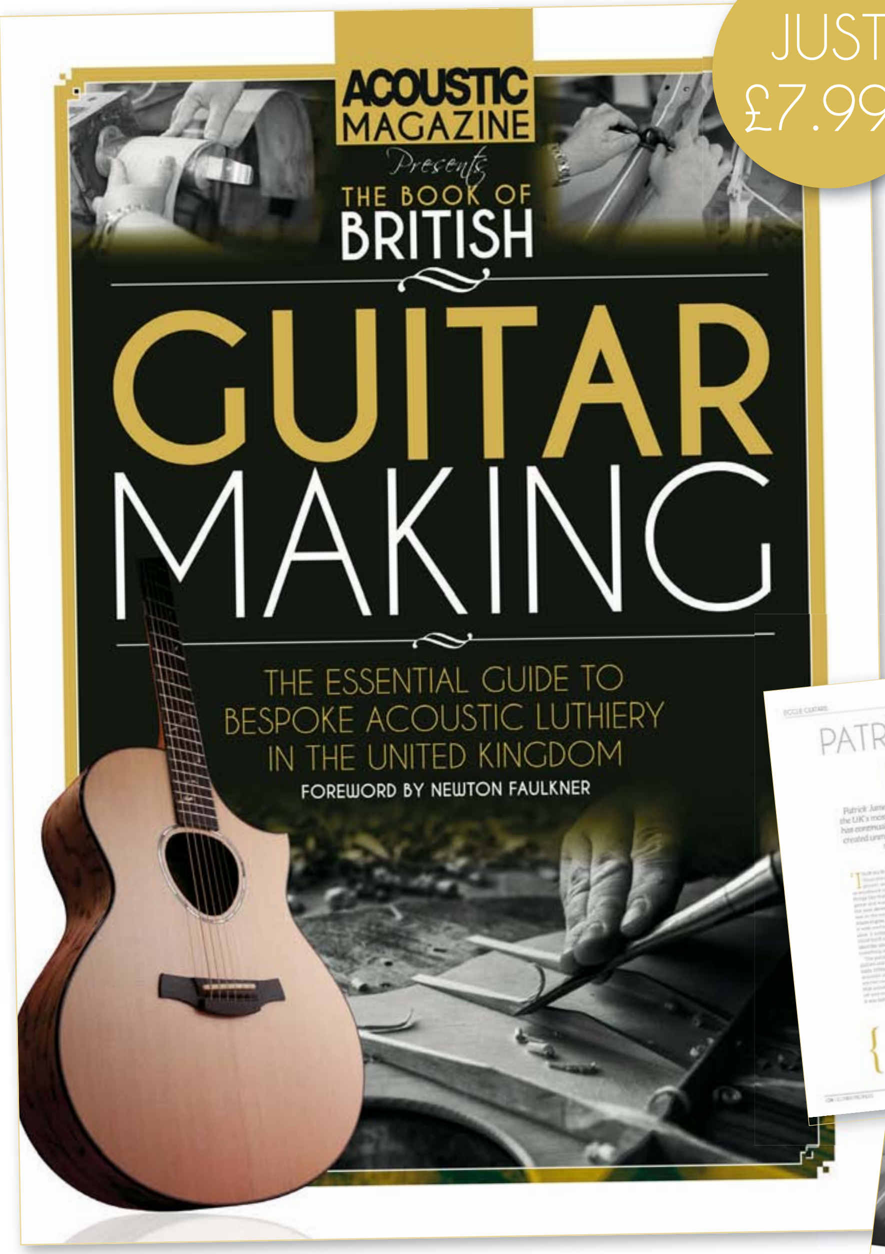

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IN THE LOOP

TURNING BASIC CHORDS PATTERNS INTO UNUSUAL LOOPING SEQUENCES

How do we define success as a musician? For some people it's selling thousands of albums, for others selling out Wembley stadium – or even the local pub. For me, it's all about coming up with interesting chord sequences and guitar parts. In this month's column we'll be looking at getting the most from a fairly basic chord progression. You don't have to just loop your guitar, you can loop your voice like Jamie Lidell, beat box like Shlomo or play multiple instruments like Andrew Bird.

I recently saw a loop musician playing a gig in a bookshop. As long as you have a mic or pickup, a loop pedal and a small portable PA you can play anywhere. Adjust the dynamics of the loop performance to suit where you are playing. In this context, dynamics are your best friend. The End festival in Crouch End, London, place artists in venues including an ice cream parlour, the local library, shops and a coffee house. Be prepared to work within any context, as these can be the most interesting gigs. If something unusual happens, try and incorporate that into the show. Why not record a person talking in the front row and make a loop out of it? Embrace the unexpected.

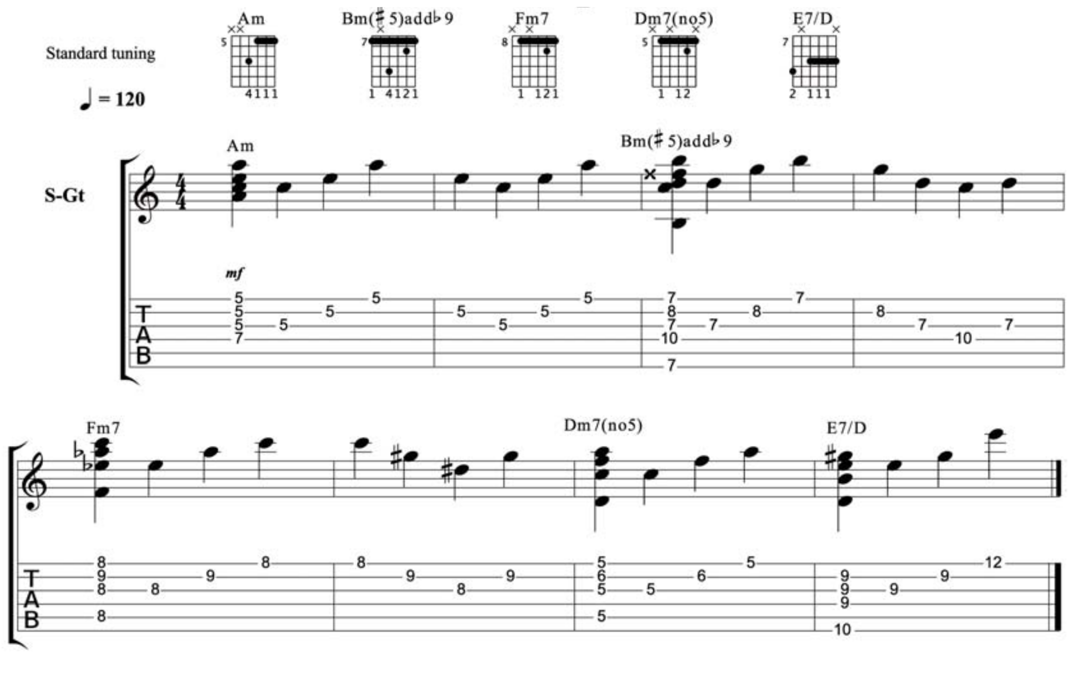
When you are looking at choosing a loop pedal, think about what you want to achieve with it in your live performances and where you will be playing. Are you looking just to loop around a few chords for one song in the set or will your entire act be based around live looping? Do you need to store more than one loop in your pedal (perhaps one for a verse and one for a chorus)? Do you need a metronome or an undo feature? Perhaps a mic input to loop vocals or another instrument as well as your guitar? Think about how you want to present your arrangements live. Each loop pedal has its own set of features, try a few different ones to find out what works for you.

This month, we're going to create a chord sequence that is unusual enough to keep an audience's attention wherever you are playing. Our initial chord sequence in **example 1** is Am, Bm#5 (add B9), Fm7, Dm7 (no fifth) and E7/D (third inversion). I initially came up with this sequence for a collaboration with a remarkable folk musician who was looking for some interesting chords to work with for a new song. Unusual chord progressions are useful for inspiring interesting melodies. Hit record on your loop pedal and record in **example 1** and leave it looping. When recording loops, try and keep the volume fairly level so that the last chord you play sounds like it's connected to the first chord of the sequence. This takes a bit of practice, but you'll soon get the hang of it.

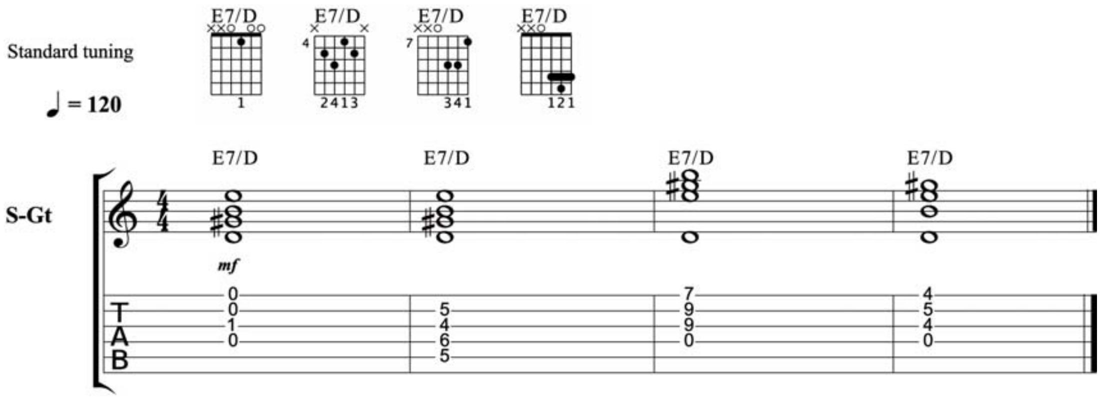
Notice that the last chord in **example 1** is a third inversion; the 7th (D) is the lowest note of our E chord. This chord gives the whole sequence an interesting lift back into the Am that starts the sequence. An inversion chord is named by the relationship of its bass note to the other notes in the chord. In our example, an E7 chord contains the notes E, G#, B and D. If the E is the lowest note, it's a straight E7 chord. If the G# is in the bass, it is a first inversion; if the B is in the bass it is a second inversion. In **example 2**, the D is in the root and this chord is called a third inversion. This is often written down in chord sequences as E7/D (meaning the D is added as the lowest note of the chord in addition to the notes of the E chord). **Example 2** shows the last chord of **example 1** (E7/D) in a few different positions across the neck; you can swap any of these chords with the one in the last bar of **example 1** as it's the same chord – just arranged a little differently.

Now this loop is fairly interesting as a standalone piece, but we can add some more guitar parts over the top. **Example 3** is our initial five

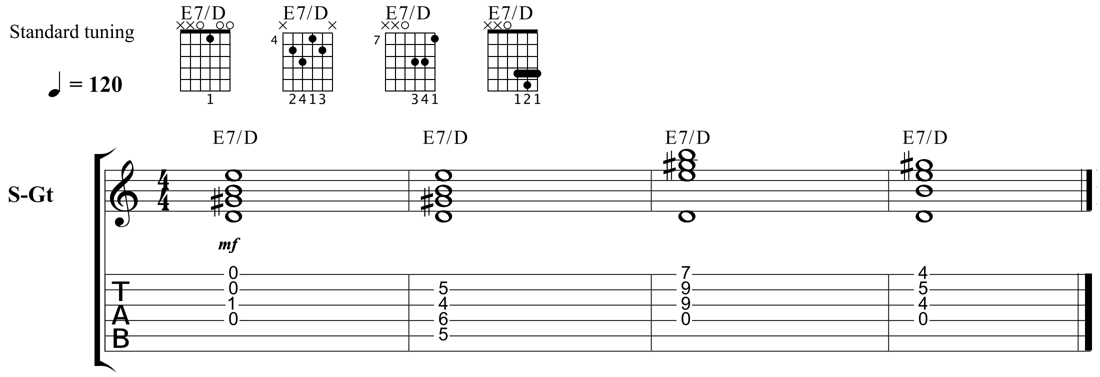
EXAMPLE 1



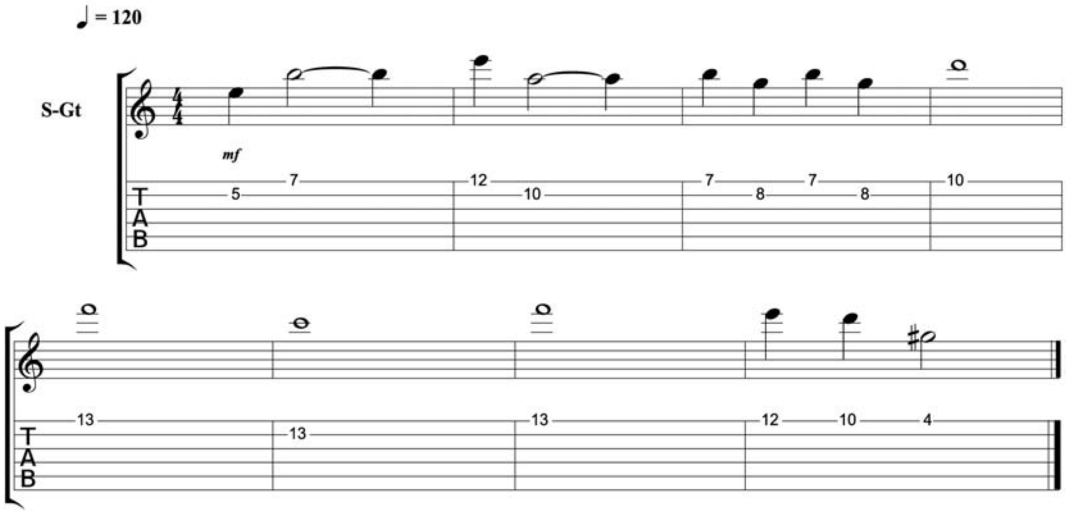
EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



chords arranged elsewhere on the neck. Hit overdub on your loop pedal and record this part over the top of **example 1**. Notice how the parts work together? Just by playing the chords in different positions, we have made our original sequence more interesting. In **example 3**, the last chord is played as a first inversion with the G# note of the chord played as the bass note. These inversions are really useful for surprising the listener and keeping people's attention.

Example 4 is a simple melody that can be played over the loop we have built up with **example 1** and **example 3**. The melody is suggestive of the notes – and chords themselves – with sustained tones. If you have a delay pedal attached to your electro-acoustic guitar this would work well here – or you could try a few different pedals and see what works for you.

The general rule is: the more interesting the chord sequence, the simpler melody you can get away with; you don't need anything elaborate. Think of 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond' by Pink Floyd. The guitar parts are relatively simple, but what makes the piece interesting is the chord sequence (with some amazing sounds and production). Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys was a master of this around the time of the *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* albums – interesting chord sequences with lovely simple melodies. Try the Beach Boys track 'Wonderful' (from *Smile*); it's a stunning chord sequence with a lovely melody, sung with great emotion.

Sometimes it's hard to come up with exciting and unique chord progressions, but learning chords in as many positions and in as many different inversions as possible can help to keep things interesting. Learn as much theory as possible – knowledge really is power. Listening widely to other loopers and composers can really help, too. Take ideas from one genre and play them in the context of another. Keep trying out new ideas and concepts until you find your own unique style.

Matt Stevens

MATT STEVENS

Instrumental Composer

Matt Stevens is a musician and composer from London. An instrumental artist, he uses an acoustic guitar and sampler to create multi-layered tracks live. His music has been described as "a guitar orchestra". He plays live all over the UK and listens to Sonic Youth, Carcass, Nick Drake, Cardiacs and King Crimson. He is constantly recording new music for several projects.

www.mattstevensguitar.com

NEW MUSIC

MARTIN BARRE

ORDER OF PLAY

www.martinbarre.com

It must be frustrating to have been an integral part of a band such as Jethro Tull and then unexpectedly find yourself sidelined. Such is the position of Martin Barre, the one-legged flautists' right-hand man for four decades. But undaunted and following hard on the heels of his acoustic album, Martin's now wheeled his road band into the studio, where they've recorded 10 songs by his old boss alongside four dusty blues classics. And fine stuff it is too. Obvious standouts are Tull favourites 'Locomotive Breath' and 'Thick As A Brick' with vocalist Dan Crisp wisely steering away from any Anderson impersonations, and Martin's guitar working a treat. And with its mandolin introduction, it's a measure of the band's vision that they can even breath new life into 'Crossroads'.

JULIAN PIPER

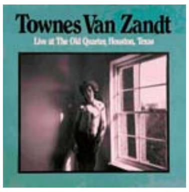
BELA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN

BELA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN

www.belafleck.com

Sitting back to back with banjos at the ready on the CD sleeve, Mr. and Mrs. Fleck is an imposing pair, and although they've been trading licks since 2005, this is their first recorded collaboration. Bela Fleck, of course, is to banjo what Hendrix was to electric guitar; there's nothing he can't tackle, so it's a treat to hear him and the missus working quietly through this collection of beautifully understated murder ballads and gospel songs. With nary a 'Foggy Mountain Breakdown' in sight, it's the moody country blues feel of 'What 'Cha Gonna Do' and the sparse clawhammer suspense of the late Doc Watson's 'Am I Born To Die' that will chill, Abigail's vocals clear as Tennessee mountain dew.

JULIAN PIPER



TOWNES VAN ZANDT

LIVE AT THE OLD QUARTER

www.townesvanzandt.com

Almost 20 years on from his untimely death, the legend of Townes Van Zandt still haunts Americana music. Like Jimmie Rodgers, his singing and playing spoke of the pain of lonesome highways and lonely souls in a way that's been rarely equaled. And if you haven't heard the man, then this double vinyl 1973 live set, recorded in a sweaty Houston beer joint, is a fine start. All the Townes classics are here, the country honk of 'White Freightliner', the brooding 'For The Sake Of The Song', 'Pancho And Lefty' and 'Lungs', the whole works interspersed with a few hoary favourites like 'Cocaine', 'Lightning Hopkins', and 'Chauffeur's Blues'. And to complete the deal, in between songs Townes even tells some pretty corny jokes, but hey – you can't have everything. A fascinating snapshot of a truly remarkable artist.

JULIAN PIPER

MARTHA TILSTON

THE SEA

www.marthatilston.co.uk

If there was any justice, Martha Tilston would be enshrined as a national treasure; everything she touches she manages to imbue with a fragile beauty that can bring tears to your eyes. This time around, with the sea as her muse, Martha's enlisted an impressive gang of musicians to help her out, including her dad Steve, Maggie Boyle and the guys from her band: Matt Tweed, Nick Marshall and Tim Cotterell. Much of the material will be familiar, 'Black Waterside' dedicated to family friend Bert Jansch, a haunting reading of 'The House Carpenter' duetting with Nathan Ball, and 'The Lowlands Of Holland', a song well known to fans of Martin Carthy. Over it all, Martha's voice soars like the siren on her own song 'Mermaid Of Zennor', cajoling, beautiful and unlike anything else in the folk miasma.

JULIAN PIPER

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON

THE PILGRIM: CH77

www.kriskristofferson.com

As our heroes battle with age, it's fascinating to see the result, and Kris Kristofferson's last album *Feeling Mortal* reflecting upon his advancing years, just about won the prize for his world weary candor. But far from being some kind of curtain call, he's back with this gem. Recorded live at the Union Chapel in September 2013, from the opening strums and wheezing harmonica that introduces 'Shipwrecked In The 80s', the listener is sucked inexorably into Kristofferson's warm musical embrace. Now blessed with a tremulous whiskey soaked voice, whether it's the celebrated tale of 'Me And Bobby McGhee' or singing about truck drivers drinking coffee in a roadside café, like the best story tellers, Kristofferson can weave a tale out of the simplest scenarios. A masterclass in songwriting. One can only marvel.

JULIAN PIPER

MATT WOOSEY

WILDEST DREAMS

www.mattwoosey.co.uk

Matt Woosey describes himself influenced by Rory Gallagher and Jimmy Page, and admits he inhabits a musical space somewhere between Pink Floyd and Fleetwood Mac. Certainly Matt's seventh album finds him stylistically all over the place. He works convincingly through a modal tuning on the John Martyn influenced 'Love Is The Strangest Thing', growls his way through the driving 'Same Old Blues', and croons the sparse lazy ballad that's 'Nowhere Is Home To Me', with an assurance worthy of Chris Rea. Sure its hard to imagine Dylan singing: "You were looking for someone who could keep it up" as Matt does on 'Don't Tell Nobody', but that gripe and lyrics aside, there's no shortage of creative spark, just a lack of focus. Bring in Rick Rubin.

JULIAN PIPER

THE STRAY BIRDS

BEST MEDICINE

www.the straybirds.com

"The soul is a bell and that's why music is the best medicine I sell," Maya de Vitry sings on the title track and she really isn't lying. America's running amok with bluegrass bands, but this trio from Lancaster, Philadelphia, has been turning heads at festivals the world over, including that of Bob Harris who reckoned they'll hit folk/bluegrass super stardom. Romping through 10 original songs and a couple of traditional numbers – and anyone who can make 'Pallet On My Floor' sound exciting has to be doing something right. These guys obviously have talent oozing out of every pore. Based around gorgeous harmonies, flawless spirited playing and some great songs, the Stray Birds are a cut above the pack.

JULIAN PIPER

JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE

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The young Mr. Earle is as enigmatic a character as his father and illustrious middle namesake. Over four albums, he's plundered the country and soul vaults for inspiration, but his restless innovation has always placed him fairly and squarely in a field of one. Recorded after minimal rehearsal with his road band, there's a great live feel to this album, just as if he and the boys had fallen into the studio after a night in some local bar. Naturally, his old timey and country roots are still to the fore on songs like 'Picture In A Drawer', a drawling narrative of lost love complete with a lonesome steel guitar whine, but it's the throbbing bass lines and choppy guitar on 'My Baby Drives', and the RnB strut of 'Burning Pictures' that suggest he's been turning out his old Stones albums. Where will he go next?

JULIAN PIPER

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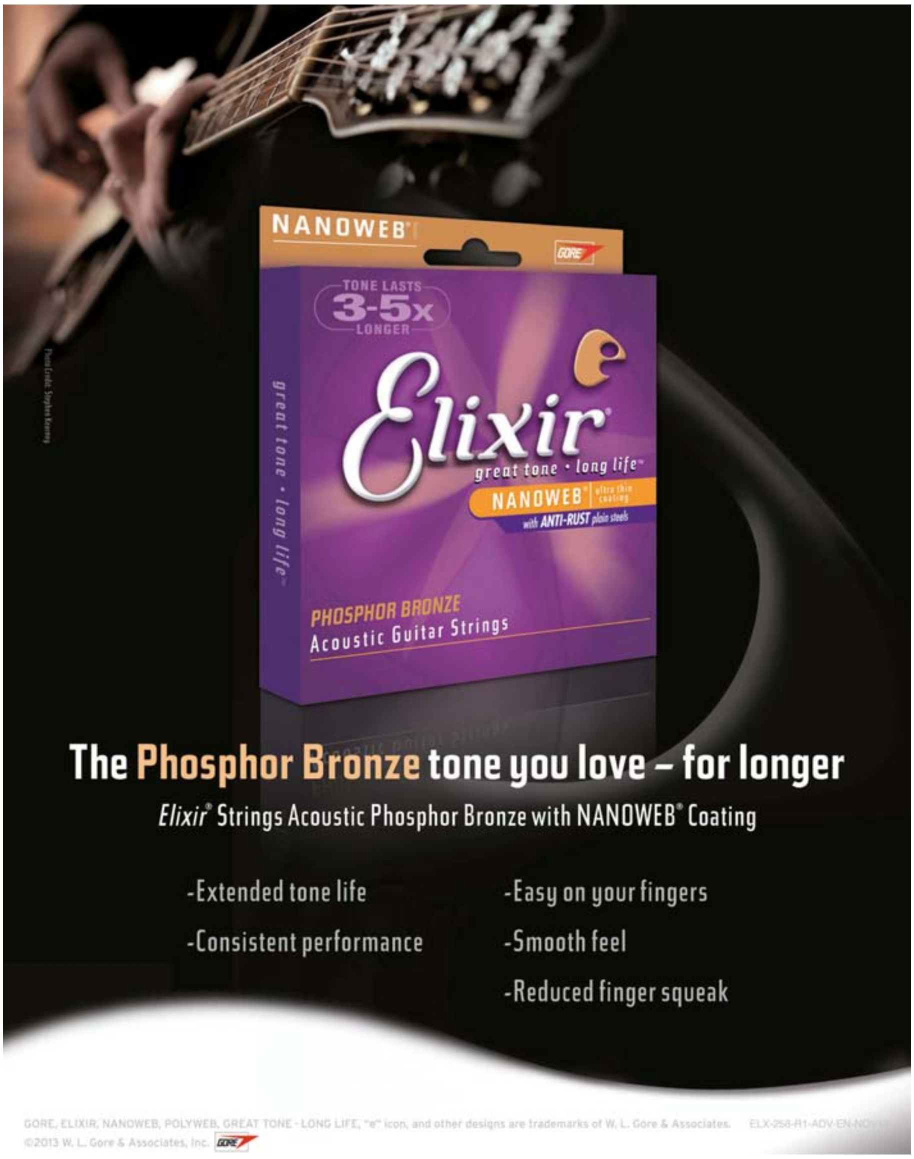

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Essex boy Carroll was born into a family of musicians and 35 years on he finally got a job writing for Acoustic magazine. In between, he spent a lot of time waiting around in airports, filing his nails and befriending theatre sound technicians.
www.clivecarroll.co.uk

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

CAMPANELLA ARPEGGIOS

USING HARMONICS – PART 1

After just a few guitar lessons, most of us will have encountered harmonics. I first discovered the ones on fret 12 by lightly touching a fretting hand finger on the string directly above the wire itself, and plucking with the thumb of the other hand. I discovered that the closer the plucking hand was to the bridge, the clearer the sound. Further harmonics can be sounded at the seventh fret, fifth fret, just behind the fourth fret, and even just in front of the third fret wire.

Harmonics have long been used in the classical repertoire and I remember my first serious encounter when trying to tackle a Catalan folk song arrangement of 'El Testament D'Amelia' by Miguel Llobet. Half way through that piece, both harmonics and standard notes are plucked simultaneously. The thumb plucks the bass notes and the index lightly touches the first string while the ring finger actually plucks the note on that same string. The register separation between bass and melody is a wonderful effect.

Another useful effect, heard more often on the acoustic steel-string, is that of campanelas or bell-like harmonics. Some refer to this technique as artificial harmonics. I first heard Chet Atkins use it, though as a teenage shred-head I didn't take much notice! It wasn't until I started touring with Tommy Emmanuel that I got to see the technique in person and thought it was most impressive. Tommy told me how he met Lenny Breau and learnt so much about the musical possibilities of this technique from him. So, thanks to Tommy, I spent the next while engrossed in the music of Lenny Breau and disappeared into an ethereal world of chordal harmonics.

Printed here at 10 examples to demonstrate how it works and some of the more frequently used chords. They can be useful within a piece, as an introduction and/or as a conclusion to an arrangement. You could even create a whole piece or section with this technique.

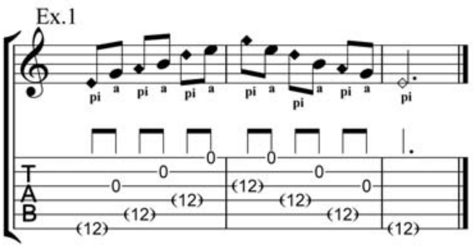
Example 1
The fretting hand is not used in this exercise. Lightly press string six above the twelfth fret wire with the index finger and at the same time sound the note by plucking with the thumb. The further away the thumb is from the index, the clearer the sound will be. Next, pluck the open third string with the ring finger. It might be useful to alternate between these two notes for a while to get the feel of it. This pairing is then repeated on strings five and two: lightly touch the fifth string at the twelfth fret wire with the index, pluck it with the thumb, then pluck the open second with the ring finger. Repeat the technique on strings four and one and the first bar is complete. The start of bar two begins with an index/thumb harmonic on string three at the twelfth fret wire followed by an open first string. Your hand will feel a little more closed as you repeat the descending pattern. Once you feel confident with the technique, try to make every single note the same volume.

Example 2
This time, the ring finger leads. Although the musical material is not too dissimilar to the previous example, it is worth rehearsing for the sensation of leading with an upper string.

Example 3
The fretting hand is used here. The plucking hand technique is exactly the same as **example 1** with the only difference being that the music is sounded five frets higher. Form a complete barre across all the strings at fret five with the first finger of the fretting hand, and all the required harmonics will sound at fret 17.

Example 4
In addition to the fifth fret

EXAMPLE 1



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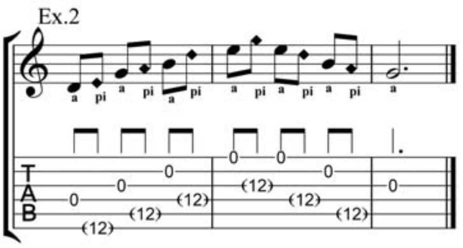
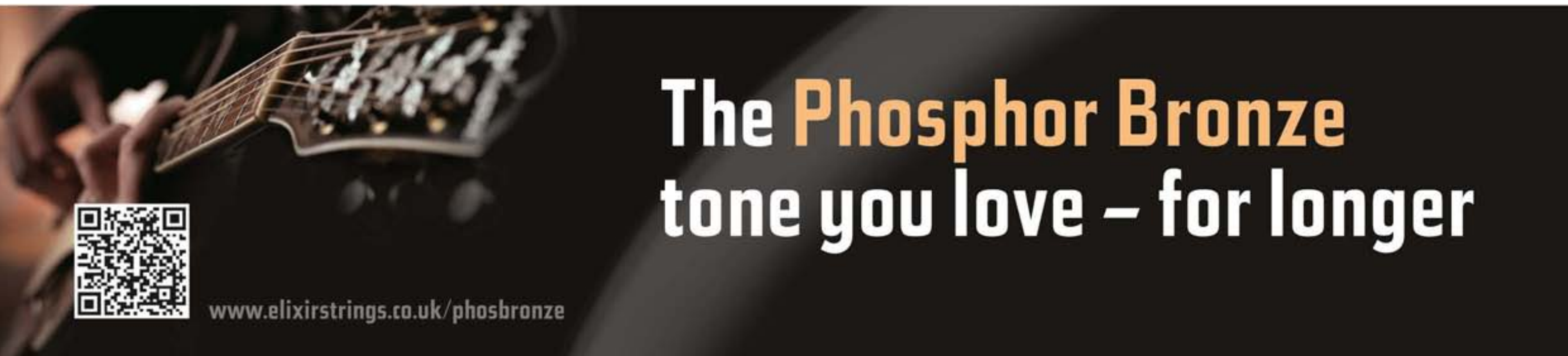




barre, add finger two on the second string, sixth fret. The plucking hand repeats the same technique as before. The chord sounded is Dm11.

Example 5

Still with the full barre at the fifth fret, finger three now takes care of the second string F at the sixth fret and the second finger frets the Bb on string six at the sixth fret. Take a minute to strum this beautiful chord of BbMaj7 13. There is now a difference in the plucking hand as the sixth string note has been raised by one fret to the eighteenth. Pluck this note with the index/thumb technique, then sound the ring finger on the third string before returning to the seventeenth fret wire for the remainder of the exercise, bar the final note.

Example 6

The chord shape of E9 as voiced works very well when played with the alternating harmonic/note technique. Remember that this shape is transposable so have a go at shifting the shape around the neck.

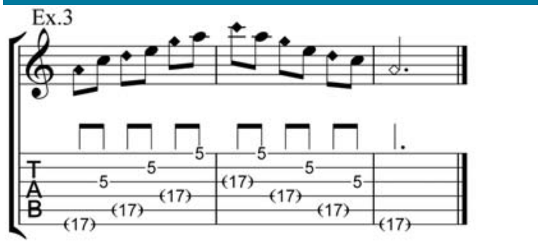
Example 7

This is a very useful minor ninth chord shape. My regular fret-hand fingering is: finger two on strings six and five, finger one on string four, finger three on strings three and two, and finger four on the first string.

Example 8

This diminished chord is a good exercise for alternating between the nineteenth and eighteenth fret harmonics. The fret wires themselves are closer which stresses the accuracy that is required for a clean, crisp note.

EXAMPLE 3



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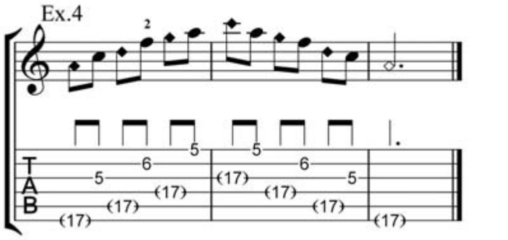

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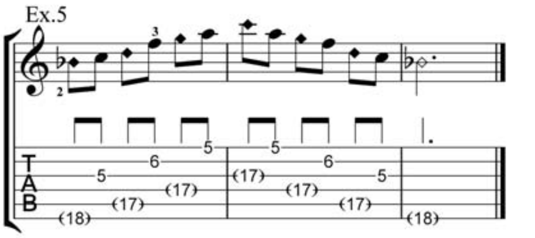

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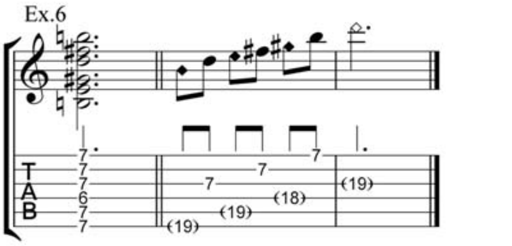

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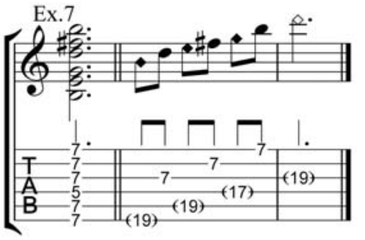

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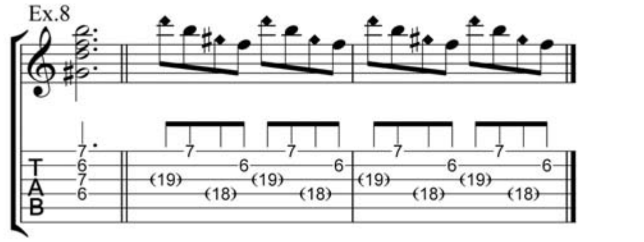
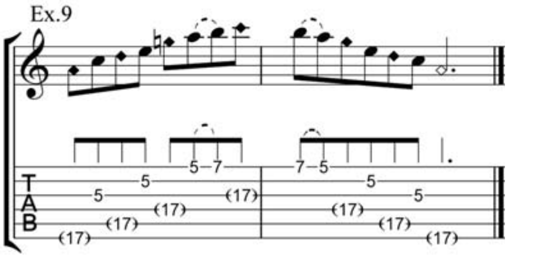
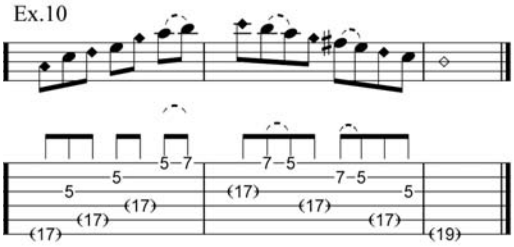


EXAMPLE 9



EXAMPLE 10



Example 9

This exercise includes harmonics, standard notes, a hammer-on and a pull-off! Begin with a first finger barre at fret five and perform as in example 3. When the first string is sounded, hammer on with finger three or four, leave it there, play the harmonic on string three, and then pluck the first string B before pulling off to the A. Descend as before. Be careful not to rush the hammer-on or pull-off, and ensure that every note in the exercise is the same length.

Example 10

In addition to the first string hammer-on/pull-off, another pull-off is played on string two for this example.

I hope this serves as a useful introduction to this wonderful bell, or harp sounding technique. In my next article I will carry on from where we left off with some great shapes I nabbed from "the road" as well as some of my own.

Clive Carroll

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TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

FAREWELL BLUES

EXPLORING THE BANJO IN JAZZ MUSIC

LEON HUNT
UK Banjo Expert

Leon Hunt continues to confound the stereotypes that try to confine the banjo to bluegrass, by making his living playing alongside some of the world's top musicians from a number of musical styles and disciplines. That said, he's not one to shy away from the clichés either – watch the TV for a long enough and there's every chance you'll hear some of his music. Leon has also enjoyed being part of several major theatre productions and as well as being a frequent contributor to *Acoustic*, Leon also recently completed his debut instructional package for Mel Bay, which is out now. ***www.leonhunt.com***

APP EXTRA
PRESS **PLAY** FOR ADDITIONAL VIDEO CONTENT

Not only has the banjo been an integral part of jazz music from almost the very beginning, jazz has also always been an essential component in bluegrass and particularly the banjo in bluegrass. Ever since Earl Scruggs began to develop his approach to the instrument back in the 1940s, consciously or subconsciously, the Louis Armstrong recordings he was hearing had a profound effect on the end result. With this year marking the centenary of the earliest known examples of the banjo being used in jazz, it seems fitting that this month's offering should be the first of a two-part exploration into the relationship the banjo has had with jazz throughout the past 100 years.

It didn't take the pioneering New Orleans and Dixieland jazz bands long to recognise and take full advantage of the uniquely loud and percussive characteristics of the four-string tenor and plectrum variants of the banjo. It became pretty obvious that the acoustic guitars that were available at that time were never going to be a match for a band comprising mostly of blaring brass and woodwind instruments. The banjo quickly became the obvious choice for providing most of chordal rhythm within early jazz.

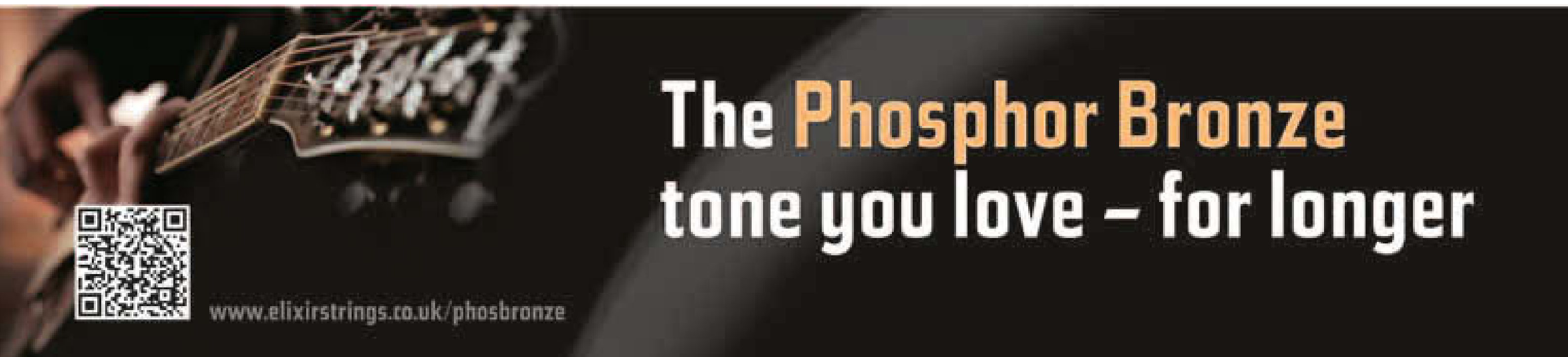
The instrument enjoyed a new lease of life during these formative years and even occasionally stepped out of the rhythm section and into the front line. Players such as Johnny St. Cyr (Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton) and later Lawrence Marrero (George Lewis and Bunk Johnson) were hugely significant, albeit indirectly, in influencing the state of modern popular music, the effects of which can be heard right up to today. Marrero was a great inspiration and hero to Lonnie Donegan, who in turn went on to inspire the Beatles and just about everybody else in Britain who was attempting to make pop music at that time.

Although not strictly speaking a part of the jazz movement per se, at least initially, players such as Harry Reser and Eddie Peabody injected some serious virtuosity into the proceedings. While Reser's contribution to the banjo was huge, it should be noted that it pales into insignificance to his cousins', Wilbur and Orville Wright's contribution to modern transportation methods. There's nothing quite like a couple of overachieving relatives when it comes to some serious "thunder stealing". Do a YouTube search for both of these guys (not the Wright brothers) and you'll find some amazing stuff, especially Peabody who was not only an incredible soloist, but also a shockingly hammy entertainer. Also, while you're about it, look up Ken Aoki's 'The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise', one of my all-time favourite YouTube clips. It's also worth noting that ragtime, now known primarily as a piano-led form of music thanks to the likes of Scott Joplin and Joseph Lamb most probably started out on the five-string banjos that were so popular at that time.

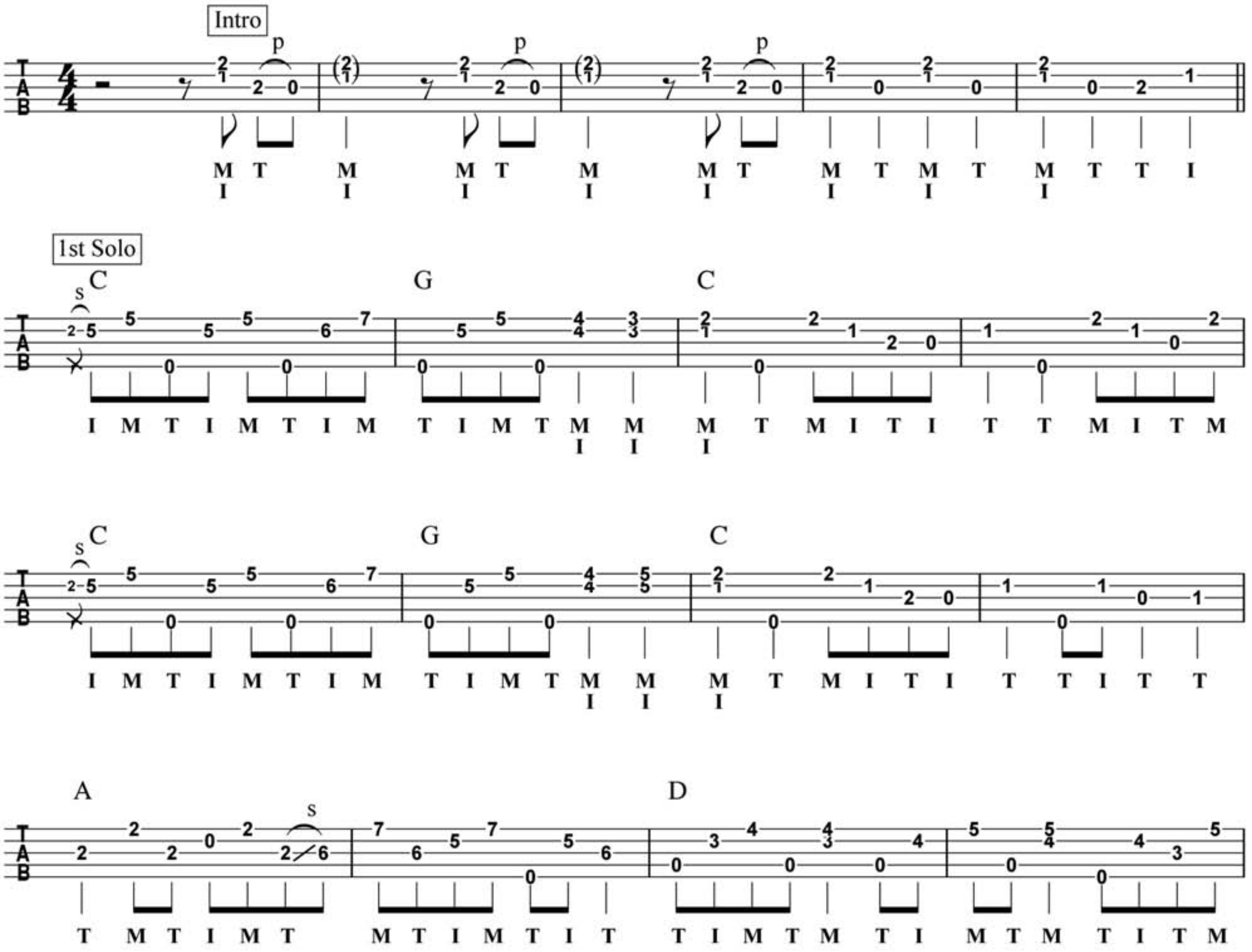
It was all going so well for the banjo but then jazz began to have some of the rough edges knocked off of it, becoming less brash and dropping the foxtrot rhythm in favour of more of a quickstep feel. Gibson's brand new archtop acoustic guitars also had far more volume and presence than previous models so many players and bandleaders started to gravitate towards these new instruments. This evolution continued, with the final blow to the banjo's dominance in jazz being the arrival of the electric guitar. Several decades on and we now have players like Pat Metheny who wilfully produces the least banjo-like sound humanly possible.

Roll forward a couple of decades beyond the inception of jazz, and the improvisational spirit, syncopation, swing and musical vocabulary it brought with it had changed music forever. Western bands had become western swing and mainstream popular music had all of a sudden become extremely jazzy. Further afield, European gypsy music was becoming gypsy swing and Jamaican mento was becoming ska; the list goes on.

To be very much included in this list would be the



FAREWELL BLUES - KEY OF C



originator of bluegrass banjo himself: Earl Scruggs. As well as the musical lexicon he had devised for the banjo drawing heavily on jazz, many of his own compositions took on an overtly jazz form and feel such as 'Dear Old Dixie' and 'Foggy Mountain Special'. Clearly making no secret of his jazz leanings, Scruggs even went as far as to adapt a few popular jazz tunes for the five-string, something that players have continued to do ever since.

'Farewell Blues' is one such example. If you're unfamiliar with the tune, be sure to listen to Benny Goodman's version of it as well as this banjo adaptation. It will provide a great insight into the way Earl heard music and the approaches he took to applying it to his instrument, playing to its strengths and elegantly navigating around the limitations. The tablature I've provided here is the version I recorded for my "Tribute to Earl Scruggs" record a few years back, entitled 'Farewell Blues' strangely enough. The tune is gloriously angular and, to my knowledge, unique in its chord structure, making it oddly liberating when it comes to improvising within it; you could play pretty much anything you like inside (or outside, depending on how "jazz" you want to be) the framework of its chord sequence and there would still be no mistaking that it's 'Farewell Blues' that you're playing. You can hear the corresponding recording to this tablature in the digital edition on your iPad or phone.

In the second half of this jazz odyssey, we'll be looking at how five-string banjo players have continued to explore the jazz lexicon and how we've arrived at the situation where in a couple of extreme cases – and I'm sure there's far more to follow – the banjo is now being reintroduced into established modern jazz bands.

Leon Hunt

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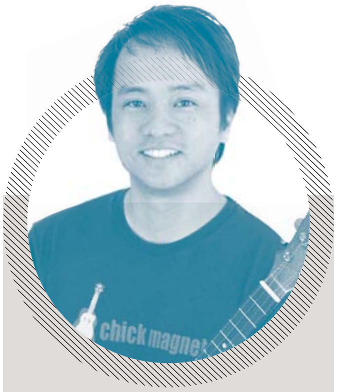


DANIEL HO
Grammy Award-winning musician

Daniel Ho is a multiple Grammy Award winner and record producer specialising in Hawaiian music. In 2010, Daniel's solo ukulele album *Polani* became the first of its kind to receive a Grammy nomination. He has numerous Hawaiian music industry accolades, has authored eight tuition books and tours the world as an acclaimed songwriter, performer and university lecturer. Daniel was born in Honolulu, but is now based in Los Angeles.
www.danielho.com

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

SILENT NIGHT

HOLIDAY CLASSICS FOR THE UKULELE

Here's to the happiest of holidays! Whether it's clamoring with songs sung wildly out of tune, or celebrated tranquilly in the still of the night, your ukulele is right at home livening up the festivities. I enjoy the resonating beauty of songs like, 'O Come All Ye Faithful' and 'Little Drummer Boy'. Another centuries-old classic is 'Silent Night'. Recognised worldwide in different tongues, we grew up singing it in the vowel-rich Hawaiian language, as "Pōla'i ē".

In **example 1**, we have the first 16 bars of 'Silent Night' with basic chords written above the staff. Let's see how we can create an engaging presentation of the song for solo ukulele.

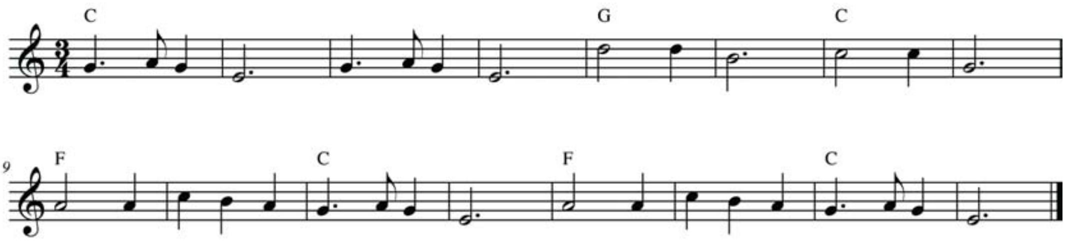
The popularity and timeless nature this song can be attributed to its thematically crafted melody. Without straying far from that which makes it great, we'll use the melody as the source of our arrangement material. The second and third notes of the melody, A and G, move downward in a step-wise motion. This simple melodic fragment will be the theme of our arrangement. See **example 2**.

Now that we've decided on our arrangement's motif, the next question is, "Where and how do we use it?" Here are two rules of thumb: firstly, try to place it in a different part of the scale from the melody, so the melody and arrangement motif (often referred to as a counterpoint or countermelody) don't run into each other. Secondly, use it when the melody is not active, so the melody and countermelody can be heard as a conversation between two voices.

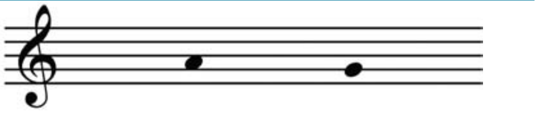
That sounds like a tall order, but it is well worth the effort to add a unique signature to your music. To keep the countermelody away from the melody, we'll transpose the notes A and G down to E and D. Then, we'll place it in the little space immediately following the first melody note. Look at **example 3**; this is how the first bar of 'Silent Night' looks with our new countermelody (the notes with the stems pointing up is the melody and the notes with the stems down is the countermelody). Interestingly, the countermelody occurs before the theme from which it was derived – a musical herald. Next, we'll use our arrangement motif twice in bar two. The first instance will be inverted, or turned upside-down, and transposed down to the notes B and C. **See example 4**.

The second occurrence will be the original arrangement motif one octave lower. **See example 5**. We'll place them right after the melody note, E, which occurs on the downbeat of bar two.

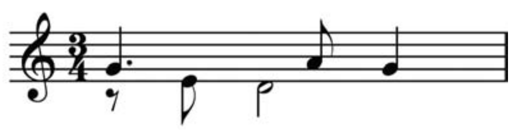
EXAMPLE 1



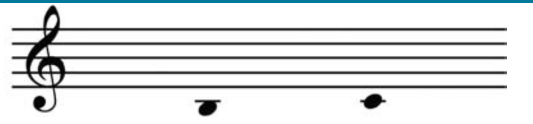
EXAMPLE 2



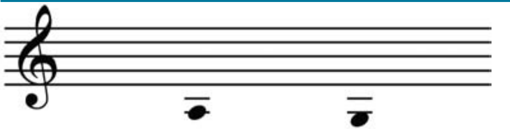
EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



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Example 6 is what bar one and two look like with the melody and its counterpoint.

Notice that the melody and countermelody don't move at the same time. They have a reflective conversation with each other. Quite a bit of effort went into two bars of music! But don't be a Scrooge, as we still have two more steps to go. If you take a look at the counterpoint we created, you'll notice that it is comprised of three two-note fragments. To add yet another dimension of structure and fluidity, we're going to add a C note on the last eighth note of bar one in **example 7.**

Observe that this strategically placed note bridges our first and second countermelodies to create two descending passages. Our multi-dimensional counterpoint can now be perceived in two ways: as three fragments of our arrangement theme, or two descending lines.

Finally, the last step of the process is to figure out how to play these notes on the ukulele. As you know, the same note can be played on different parts of the instrument. For example, the note A can be played on the open first string, or by fretting the fifth fret of the second string. Our primary concern when arranging this melody and countermelody on ukulele is to try to execute both melodies as independent voices. See **example 8**.

Notice that the first note of the countermelody, E, is played on the fourth fret of the third string. If it was played on the open second string, it would have ended the sustain of the first melody note, G, which is also played on the second string. Though it is not always possible on four strings, the presentation of the melody and countermelody as independent voices takes precedence over simpler fingerings that interrupt the melodic lines.

Just because the melody restates itself verbatim in bars three and four, we did not rest on our laurels and use the same countermelody. We created a new counterpoint to the same melody notes, but it remains thematic to the original we wrote in bars one and two. Take a look at **example 9** to see how the two countermelodies look.

As you can see and hear, this could be a song all on its own if you didn't play the melody. That is because they are derived from the same two-note motif G and A. Now, here is the melody and counterpoint arranged for ukulele in **example 10.**

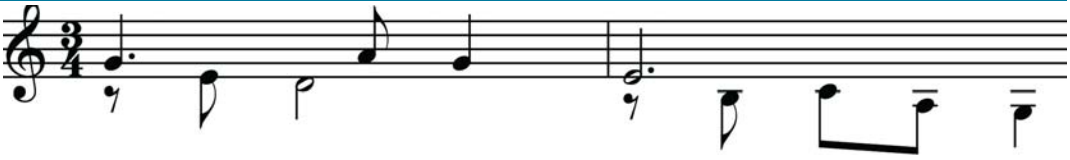
See how the strings are selected to allow the melodies to ring out with each other? Neither cuts off the other.

This thought process was used to carefully choose and place each note of this ukulele arrangement of 'Silent Night (Pola'i e)'. Extensive use of the campanella (harp-like) technique allows the melody and counterpoint to chime in succession. It creates moments of consonance and dissonance that make the ukulele sound richer and fuller. This arrangement can be performed as an instrumental, or with vocals the second time through. I've also included the first verse to 'Silent Night' in the Hawaiian language for you to download from the website. Enjoy the music and may your ukulele bring you much joy during the holidays.

The recording and sheet music of Daniel's 'ukulele and vocal arrangement of 'Silent Night (Pola'i e)' is available from Daniel's website and iTunes.

Daniel Ho

EXAMPLE 6



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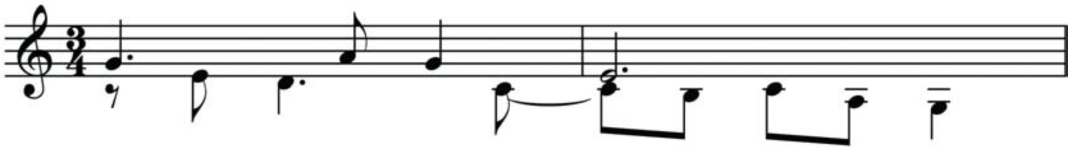

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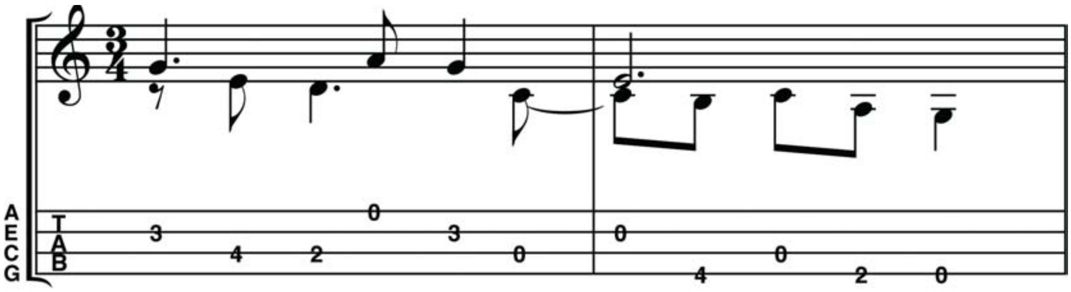
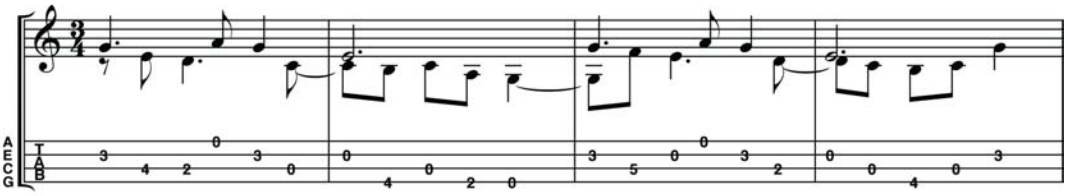


EXAMPLE 9

EXAMPLE 10



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THOMAS LEEB
Fingerstyle Virtuoso

Austrian-born Thomas Leeb plays a style he calls "the bastard child of acoustic fingerstyle." This style owes as much to percussive techniques as traditional fingerstyle guitar as his tunes are usually punctuated by slaps, pops and beats. Adding to the overall effect is his frequent use of ringing harmonics. 'What Thomas does on an acoustic guitar probably shouldn't be legal.'
www.thomasleeb.com

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ONLINE EXTRA DOWNLOAD THE FULL TRANSCRIPTION OF 'PALUUMUUTTAJA' AT **WWW. ACOUSTICMAGAZINE.COM**

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

PALUUMUUTTAJA (BACK TO HOME)

TAKING ON A FINNISH PIECE BY J-P PIIRAINEN

I'm happy and proud to be able to introduce you to J-P Piirainen who hails from Finland. "Paluumuuttaja" translates roughly to "someone who comes back home after living far away" but if that's a bit of a mouthful, you're welcome to stick with the slightly more manageable 'Back To Home'. The clear and catchy melody lines really make this tune stand out even though it's in regular tuning and the chord shapes are fairly standard.

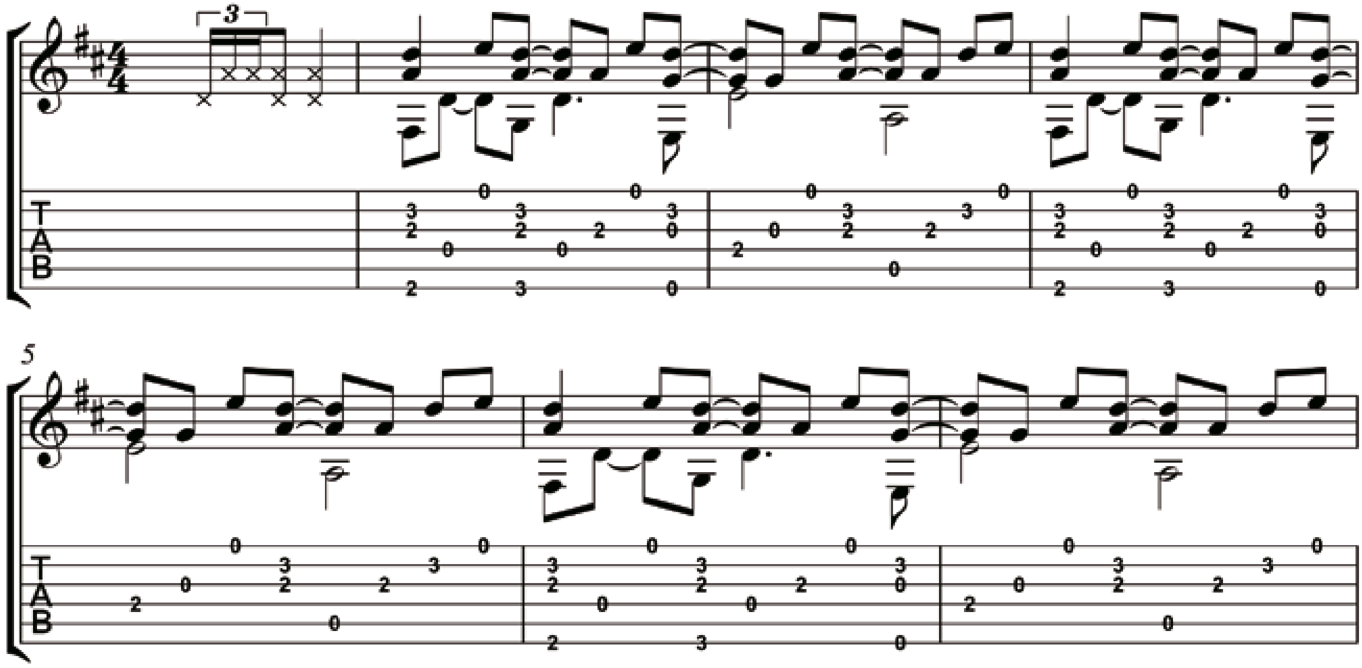
It's a pretty straight-forward piece – make sure you are comfortable with the picking pattern of the first few bars and the rest should come to your fairly quickly. The video is the best way to figure out fingerings. You can see that many of the sections are almost identical, so there's not actually that much to learn, although there are a lot of minute variations. Please take care to let the long melody lines flow

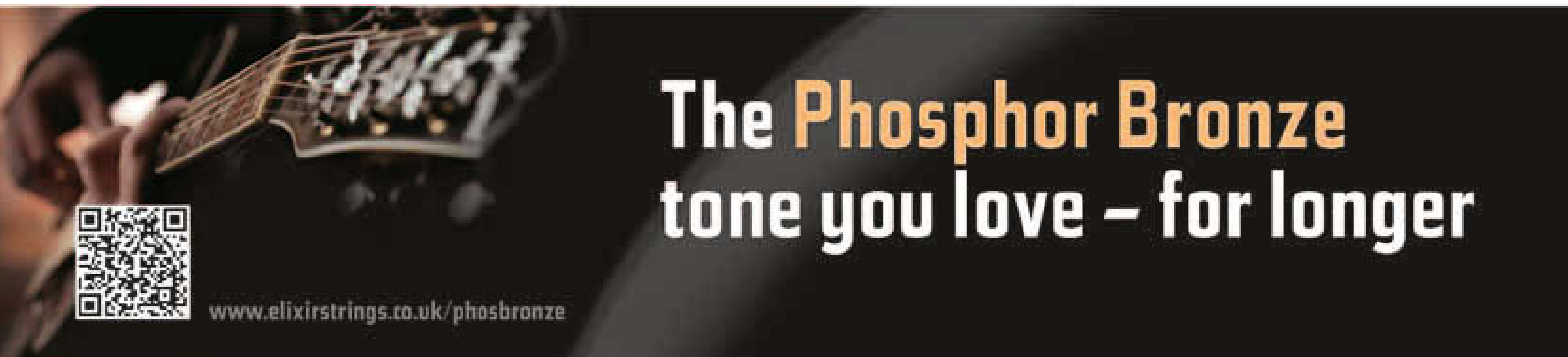
APP EXTRA
PRESS **PLAY** FOR ADDITIONAL VIDEO CONTENT

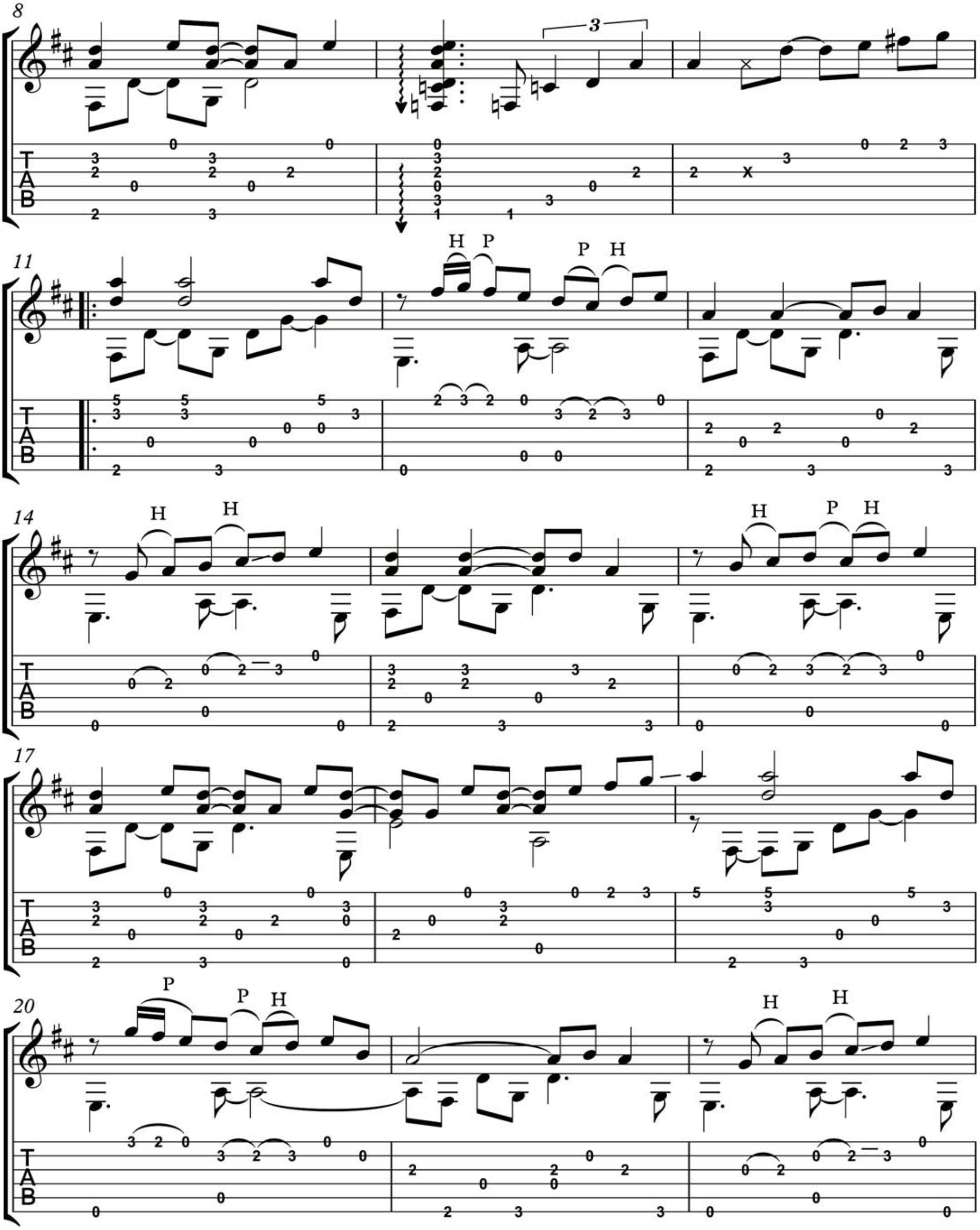
– J-P does it beautifully in his video, and he says the most important thing is to let the notes ring as long as possible, especially the open strings.

Get the full tablature from the website, and check out the video of J-P in the digital edition of *Acoustic*.
Thomas Leeb

'BACK TO HOME'







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DAVID MEAD
Tuition Author

David Mead is one of the UK's foremost guitar writers, having authored several best-selling tutors. An accomplished acoustic guitarist, he has released two critically-acclaimed albums, *Nocturnal* and *Arboretum*.
www.davidmead.net

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

COLD AND FROSTY DADGAD

ARRANGING IN THE ALTERNATE TUNING

There's a fairly obvious seasonal aspect to this month's foray into the world of DADGAD tuning. I'm aware that it's a bit cheesy to present you with a Christmas carol, despite the fast approaching holiday, but there's a good reason for it as I want to continue to take a look at how you go about arranging tunes in DADGAD. I've found many times in the past that it's a good idea to take something simple like a nursery rhyme or folk song – anything that you've been hearing practically all your life – in order to hone those arranging skills and what we have before us today is a good way of killing two birds with one stone. You get a bit of a lesson in arrangement as well as something of a party piece to prepare for when the day finally arrives.

The tools you need for arranging any tune are quite simple and straightforward. You need to know the tune and some idea of the harmony, too. In other words: melody and chords. The third ingredient is some kind of idea about the general feel and style you want to achieve in the finished piece. Here, you can really go wherever your whim takes you; arrange a ballad in a reggae style, take a fast-paced song and slow it right down or, as the Beatles noted, take a sad song and make it better. It's up to you.

So here, I decided that 'Good King Wenceslas' was a good vehicle to use as the melody is very unambiguous, doesn't have any big leaps or cover too wide a range or anything that would make it too hard to play, given the fixed timescale built in to any seasonal tune. It's amazing how short the shelf life of a carol can be – if you just finish perfecting your performance of it in mid-January, no one seems to want to listen.

As far as the feel is concerned, the tune itself is medieval – it's actually been around since the 13th century, long before the lyrics as we know them today were written – and I wanted to preserve that spirit as far as possible.

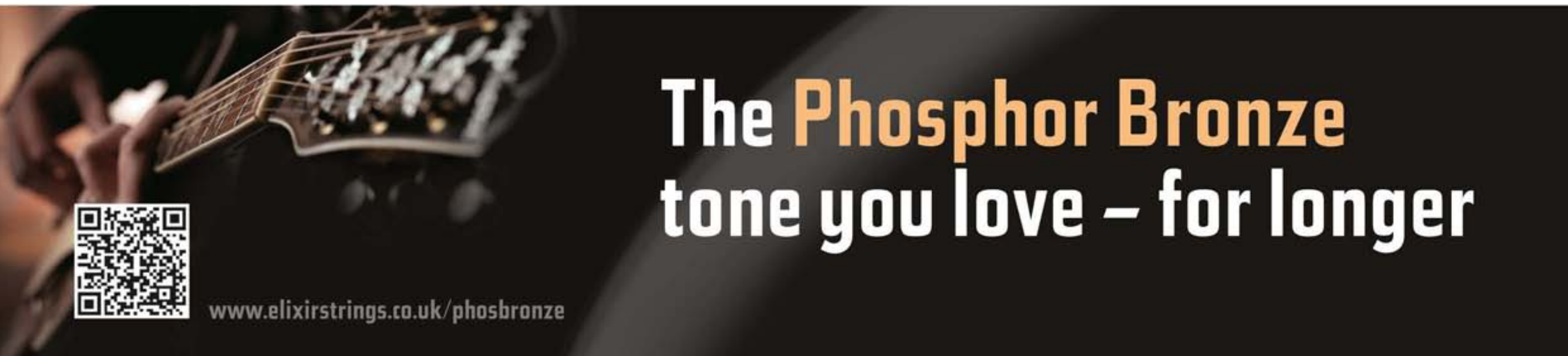
So, armed with a good idea of both melody and chord arrangement, I set to work. The first job was a simple one as I decided that I would write the tune out in D major as this would doubtless suit DADGAD tuning and keep the transcription well within reach of as many people as possible. I also avoided doing anything unnecessarily complex with the accompaniment as there's really no need. It's a well-known tune and the idea of burying it in the middle of an arrangement that was weighed down with all sorts of twists, turns and clever chord substitutions just didn't seem at all appropriate. Sometimes "keep it simple, stupid" is the best advice anyone can give you.

Mapping out the melody was simple enough; if you look at the transcription, the highest note we reach for is the A on the seventh fret, top string and the lowest is one octave lower on the open second string. So it's a single octave melody and it sits on the fretboard like it belongs there.

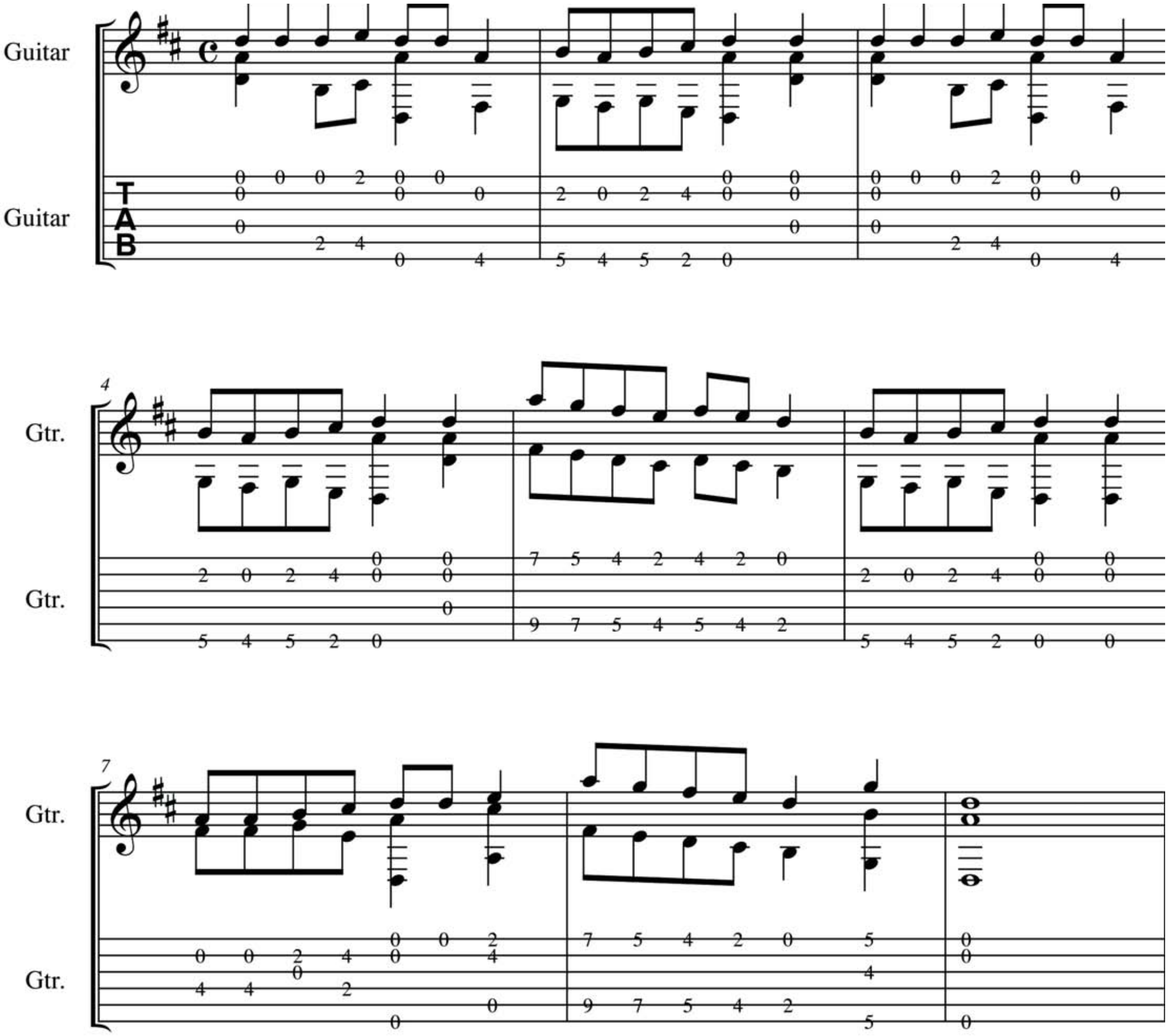
So, all's well and good, and now on to the harmony. This is basically a four-chord tune, falling into a very familiar pattern: D, Bm, G and A7 or, to translate it into music speak, it's basically a I - VI – IV - V chord arrangement, but let's not overcomplicate things with too much jargon.

One of the mistakes that a lot of people make when they first sit down to arrange a tune is they invariably try to make it either too full or too busy. What I mean here is that while it's tempting to try and play the chords underneath the melody in full, it's really not necessary. An awful lot of harmonic information can be expressed in a single bass note. As an example of how we try to keep things as open and uncluttered as possible, look at the first melody note in bar one of my transcription. The tune begins with a D and the chord underneath would be D, too. A D major chord has three notes in it: D, F# and A, but I've elected to miss out the F# and just play the open D to give a good solid bass and the open A string to offer another clue as to the prevailing harmony.

Another thing is that you really don't need the harmony following the melody note for note. Most of the time it's easier on the ear to let the melody move forward while the harmony is still. Once again, the first bar of my arrangement



'GOOD KING WENCESLAS'



is a good example of this in action. In fact, the first two bars played together provide a good contrast. In the first bar you have a fairly static harmony, whereas in the second the accompaniment gets busier. But even here it's not heavy handed; just single notes mimicking the movement of the melody as the chords spell out G, D, G, A7, D, D underneath it.

Bar five might look a little scary as we're heading off up the neck a bit more, but it's really just a repeat of the same idea as before. We're not using full chords, just single bass notes that do enough of a job in putting over the harmony without the need to make things too cluttered.

The best way to explore what's happening here is to play through the piece and listen. It should sound complete, full and wholly recognisable and, furthermore, playable – and that's really what arranging is all about.

David Mead

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TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

ROLLING RIGHT HAND

PLAY LIKE BEN HOWARD AND JOHN MARTYN WITH THIS RIGHT HAND PICKING TECHNIQUE

CHRIS WOODS
Contemporary Acoustic Groove Player

Touring instrumental guitarist, recording as 'Chris Woods Groove', described as 'changing the perceived boundaries of the acoustic guitar'. Author of the acclaimed book and DVD package *Percussive Acoustic Guitar* from Hall Leonard.
www.chriswoodsgroove.co.uk

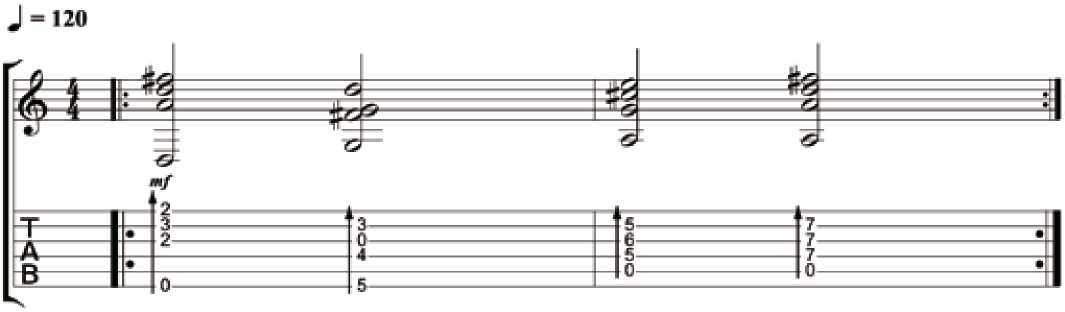
If you're a lefty, I apologise for the title! Your picking hand is your voice; it's the hand that brings colour and expression to what you play. This month I'm looking at a significant picking hand technique that breathes new life into notes and chords – and playing notes with a fast arpeggio or raked sound. I refer to this as a "right hand roll" – something you would have heard countless times from the likes of John Martyn and more recently Ben Howard. It's a subtle but effective technique, created by finger picking across several strings in a flowing motion. To really get to grips with this month's examples, you can find the tuition video in the digital edition of this issue..

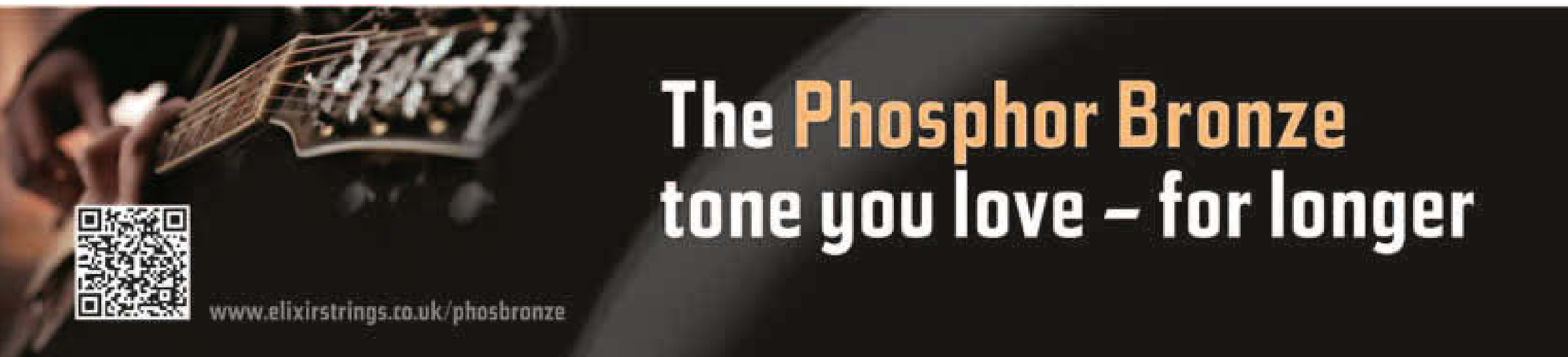
The following examples build up to one short piece, with lead playing and basic chordal playing. The right hand rolling technique is the same throughout all of the examples so make sure you focus on getting the technique right in **example one.**

EXAMPLE 1

There are four chords here, and the guitar is tuned to standard but with a dropped D. The main focus for you should be perfecting this right hand roll. To achieve this, play the relevant string with the thumb, first finger, second finger, and finally the third finger one after the other. But, instead of playing the notes in a rigid one after the other way, try to play them in a wave like effect, picking right after the other. The trick is to

EXAMPLE 1





make most the movement come from your wrist rather than your fingers, so imagine your fingers are hooked under the strings already and you just roll your wrist out.

EXAMPLE 2

In this example, I have simply thrown in a basic picking pattern with a string slap. Keep it slow and remember to turn your wrist for the string slap. Take your time to notice the repeated pattern – bass, treble, slap, treble, bass – and remember to move the bass note from the drop D to the A string on the fourth chord. Take it slow and enjoy it.

EXAMPLE 3

We are now adding a simple melodic line in between each bar from example two. Each line utilises the right hand roll, but the significant difference is our left hand assists us in making the correct sound. You use the first finger on your fretting hand to lay across the strings to mute them whilst another finger holds down the desired note, so when your picking hand plays a right hand roll, the notes leading up to the fretted note are muted. The resulting sound should be similar to that of raking a plectrum. To really get to grips with this be sure delve into the tuition video! ***www.youtube.com/chriswoodsgroove***

Chris Woods

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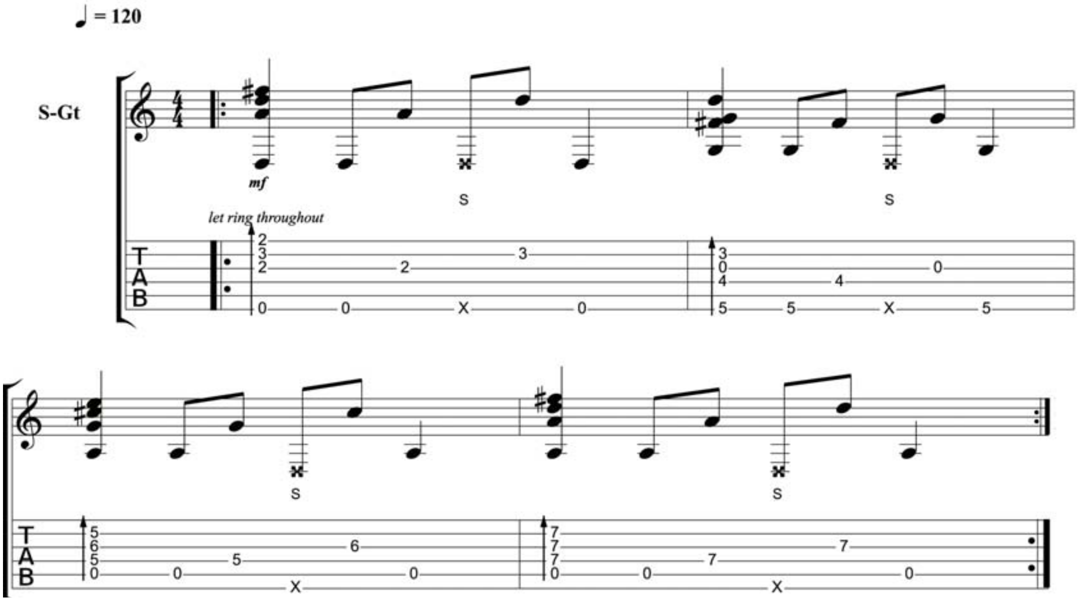
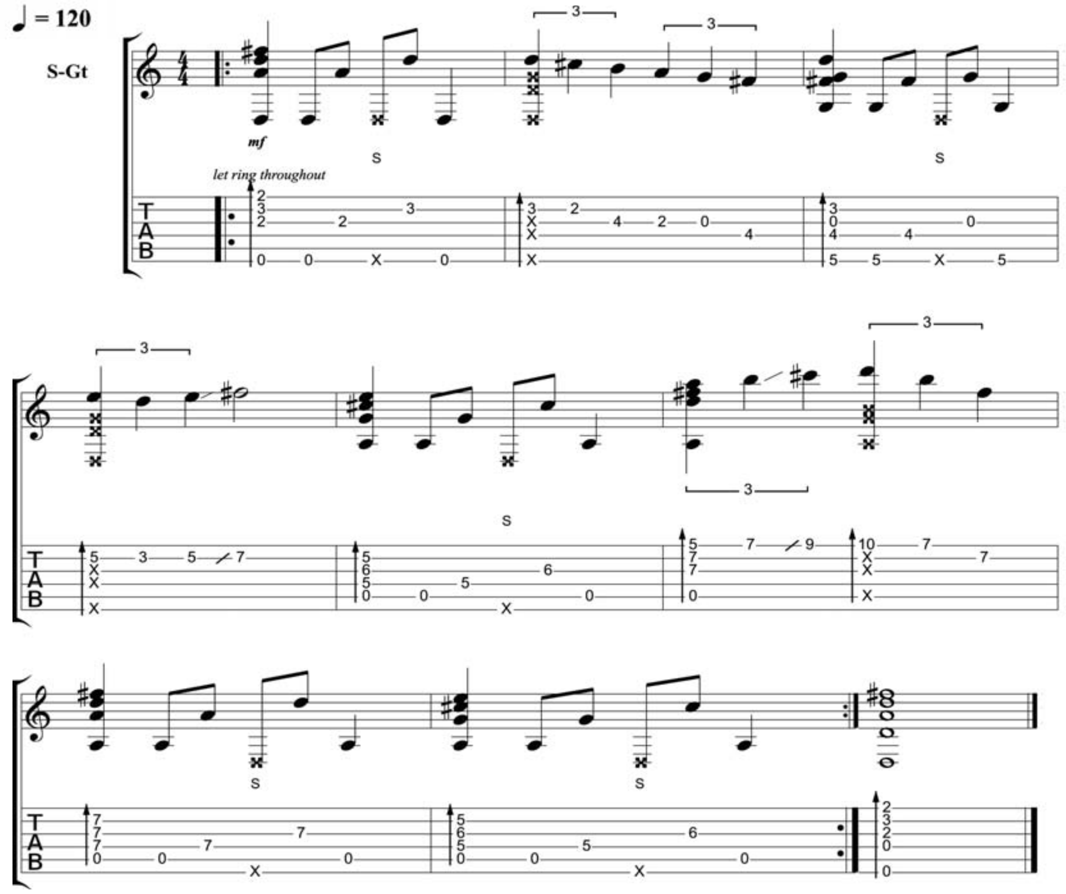
EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



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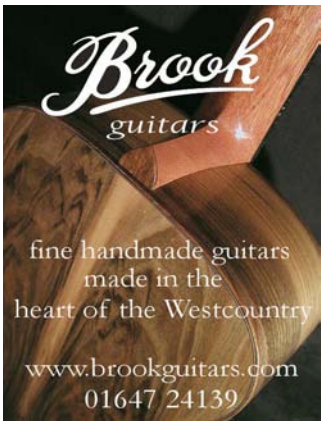

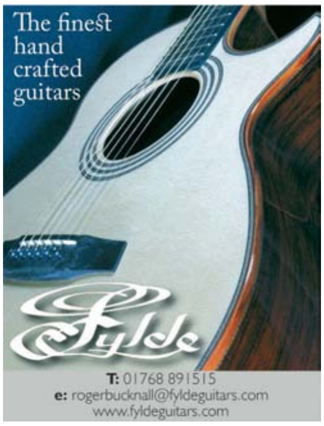

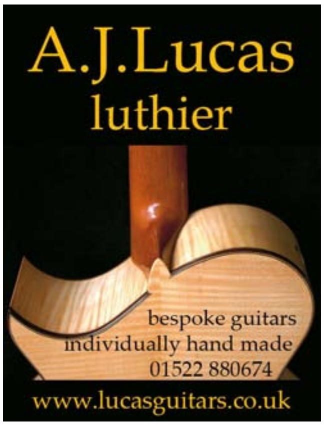

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LEGENDS

Glen Campbell

WORDS: TERI SACCONE

American musician Glen Campbell has enjoyed such a successful career as a pop and country singer that his ample skills as a guitarist are often overlooked in favour of his admired singing voice. Campbell has had a slew of classic hit songs that crossed over from country to pop including 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix', 'Wichita Lineman', 'Galveston', 'Rhinestone Cowboy' and 'Southern Nights'.

What people may not realise is that prior to superstar status, Campbell was a top-shelf session guitarist in Los Angeles in the early to mid-60s (his 12-string prowess was well-recognised on the session scene). He played with many diverse artists including the Monkees, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and Merle Haggard.

From a sleepy southern town in Arkansas, Campbell was born into a musical family and received his first guitar at age four. Showing a natural affinity for the instrument, Glen was encouraged by his musician relatives to learn and play the guitar as much as he desired. By his early teens, Glen was a fluent player while simultaneously singing in a church choir, developing his vocal skills. Despite a propensity for country music, Glen was an avid jazz lover (and a fan of Django Reinhardt). He honed his guitar skills during his teens playing on the local country scene. At age 18, he formed his own band the Western Wranglers who toured southern USA.

At 22, he was ready for bigger challenges, so relocated to Los Angeles where he became a session guitar player many for years. Some early sessions included playing with Bobby Darin and Rick Nelson. In the early 60s, Glen became a member of instrumental rock group the Champs and also worked on his own material releasing two singles 'Turn Around, Look at Me' and 'Too Late To Worry, Too Blue to Cry'. Amidst positive reception to his solo work, Campbell still continued to play on sessions. It was a single he made with the Green River Boys, 'Kentucky Means Paradise' from the album *Big Bluegrass Special* that became a hit on the country charts, climbing to number 20. Yet he doggedly continued his session work, and over the next two years played on landmark sessions with diverse artists such as Sinatra ('Strangers in the Night'), the Mamas & the Papas, and the Kingston Trio.

Glen joined the Beach Boys as a touring bassist in 1965. At the conclusion of his contract, the band offered him a more secure spot in the ranks but Campbell declined the offer due to contentions over money. The following year, Campbell signed a solo deal with a major record label. His solo breakthrough came in 1967 on the heels of two cover singles 'Gentle On My Mind' and a cover of Jimmy Webb's 'By The Time I Get To Phoenix'. Both were huge successes on the pop and country charts.

The hits continued, but what thrust him into the pop culture stratosphere was his own US network television variety show, beginning in 1968 and establishing Glen as a mainstream personality. The following decade only proved Campbell's mettle as a performer as he covered two more Jimmy Webb masterpieces in the shape of 'Wichita Lineman' (1968) and 'Galveston' (1969), both going to number one in the USA and other countries. Campbell's hits kept coming, and in 1969 he began duetting with country singer Bobbie Gentry. Their magic as a duo was indisputable on covers of two Everly Brothers gems: 'Let It Be Me' and 'All I Have To Do Is Dream'.

However, in 1972, Glen's TV show was finished and his hits dried up for the time being.

Like so many other performers, Campbell was overtaken by an addiction to drugs and drinking. After cleaning up his act, he rose up from the ashes in 1975 with the ubiquitous, infectious anthem 'Rhinestone Cowboy' before rounding out the decade with another massive hit: 'Southern Nights'. Both were huge examples of the pop/country crossover.

During the 80s, Glen recovered from his addictions. His hits continued with 'I Have You' (1988) and 'She's Gone, Gone, Gone' (covered by Alison Krauss and Robert Plant in 2008). Although Campbell cut down on recording from the 90s onward, he still performed live throughout the early 2000s. Poignantly, at age 75 in 2011, Glen shared the sad news that he has Alzheimer's disease. Nevertheless, he made it through the completion of his album *Ghost On Canvas*, which was released in August that same year, and began a tour that was to be his farewell to the music business, as he is now retired. Despite his life-altering illness, nothing can erase the his lifelong passion and contributions to music.■

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